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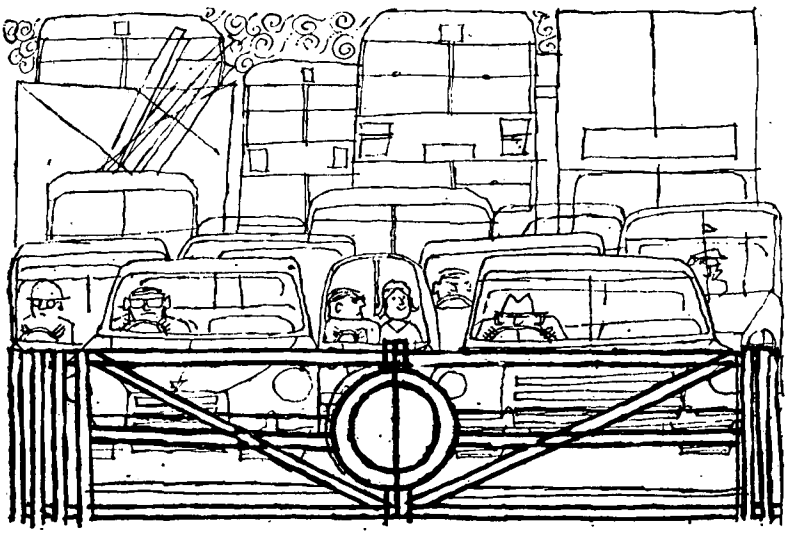

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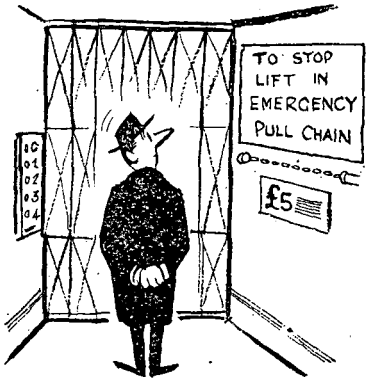

Log Book

RECENTLY, wishful to claim a rebate on an unused ticket, we found ourselves in the upper regions of a railway station. Not having realised before that it possessed upper regions, we looked round with interest when the airtight, supersonic lift had whizzed us up to the sixth floor and spat us out into a passage about a mile long, with a gentle curve like the moon's horizon, leading off each way towards infinity.

Our guiding bit of paper said Room ooo.

The first door we saw was labelled 8. We set off doggedly southwards. Deathly hush; not a soul in sight; no one would have guessed that trains were arriving and departing, music playing, not a stone's throw away.

Past Motive Power; on our right the First Aid Box; round the corner, Drawing Office. First Aid, yes, graspable, but what can they draw in the Drawing Office? Rain, Steam, and Speed? When Did You Last See the 10.38? The Laughing Station-master? The Rout of Saint Pancras?

And what goes on in that Motive Power room? We envisaged a bespectacled Elizabethan alchemist, with skulls and retorts and a vast instrument-panel, murmuring instructions to far-distant minions. "Ho you now, yarely now, more power for Yeovil; yarely for the Bow Belle."

"Anon, anon, sir!"

Or perhaps—as we passed door after door we began to wonder—was there no one at all behind them? In a sort of Kafka nightmare we imagined an endless room behind *all* the doors, in which lay a train-like Loch Ness monster with a head for each door . . .

At long last we reached ooo, and timorously tapped. No monster inside, but a savage old lady, knitting away on steel needles, a tricoteuse left over from the Industrial Revolution.

In face of her formidable silence and look of disbelief we

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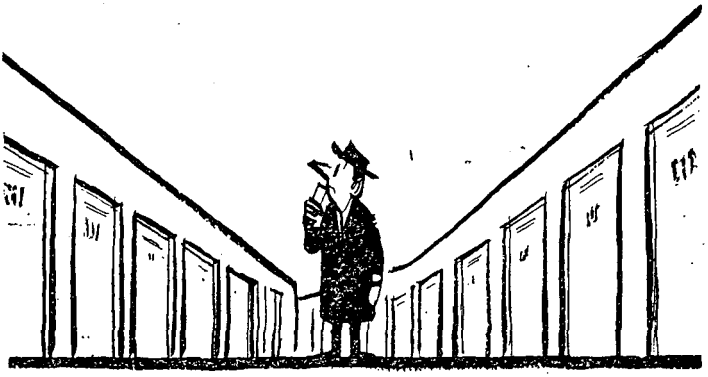


stammered out our story—that, having missed the last train from X to Y we had taken a taxi, and were now trying to get rid of an unused return half.

She fixed us with an eye steelier than her needles and enunciated: "Do ye mean to say ye will *never go to Y again?*"

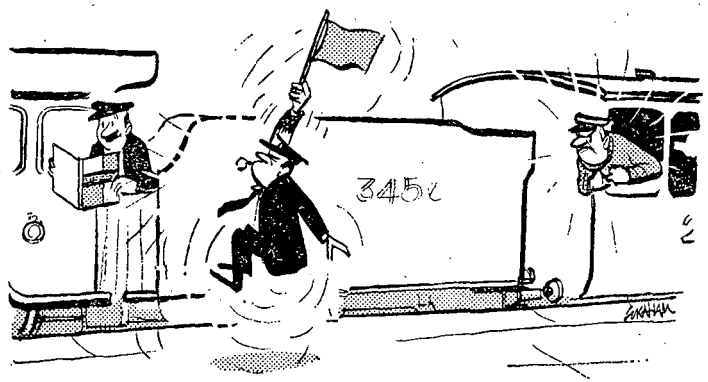
Desperate visions assailed us of what would happen if we assented: she would snarl, "I was born in Y! How dare you defame its daisied meadows? Guards, seize him! Off with his head!"

Summoning all our courage we declared that we had shaken the dust of Y off our feet for ever. What else could we do?

She grimly took down particulars and dismissed us.

Now our chief worry is *not* the fact that—even should loved ones be ill there, oil gushing in the streets, or lawyers beseeching us to go there for news to our advantage—we are bound in perpetuity never to return to Y.

What really grieves us is the fact that we left a copy of Argosy behind in the Y station waiting-room. JOHN SILVER



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tell me the old old story

by LIONEL HALE

THE gulls, swooping between the sea and the Regency terraces of Brighton, see many rosy and placid old ladies. None was rosier or more placid, on this bright September day, than Miss Matthieu.

"Good morning," she said with her cheerful little smile, to other old ladies and gentlemen, as she walked along the promenade known as Marine Parade. She was small but upright. Her step was brisk. "Good morning, good morning." She was decorously dressed in a brown tweed suit, topped by a brown velvet hat. Over her suit she wore a short fur coat. On one lapel she displayed a bunch of violets. On the other, a diamond clip caught the Brighton sun and twinkled.

There were not many inches of Miss Matthieu, but every inch was a lady.

Below, at sea level, Volk's Electric Railway kept its regular schedule. Miss Matthieu, this morning as every morning, also kept her schedule. She walked ("Good morning, good morning") from her flat at the far end of Kemp Town to her favourite Marine Parade shelter opposite the Royal Crescent. There she sat out of the wind, in the celebrated sun at Brighton, with a novel on her lap.

The "regular" on the seaside promenade is allowed some small eccentricity. Miss Matthieu carried a fly-whisk, of the old Colonial kind. It was a solid affair, on a bamboo handle. The leather loop went round her delicately blue-veined wrist, and the horsehair whisk fell by her knee as she sat in the shelter. The flies, like the rowdy trippers, disappeared as winter approached, but Miss Matthieu never left her fly-whisk at home in her small but elegant flat, even when it snowed.

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Nobody—not even the bluffest retired Colonel among the other "regulars"—questioned her about it. She was rosy, gentle, friendly; but she was also, most obviously, a lady of dignity.

It must have been the fly-whisk that attracted the attention of the rangy young man, in a suit suggesting homespun, who passed Miss Matthieu's shelter this morning. Ten yards away, he stopped. He leaned on the Parade rail and brooded, with gulls veering and squawking above his crew-cut head.

He repassed Miss Matthieu, with a sidelong glance, travelling east, leaned on the rail again, turned west, walked the ten yards past the shelter, this time with an open stare, turned back, and now stood over Miss Matthieu.

"Do you mind, ma'am," he asked in a strong Middle-West accent, "if I set here a spell?"

Miss Matthieu looked up. She saw a young man of about twenty-five, with a fresh face, a snub nose, and an honest, open expression.

"Not at all," said the old lady, with a small bow.

"That's real gracious of you, ma'am," said the young man. Then, without further hesitation, "My mom told me it was

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impolite to ask questions of total strangers, but what," he inquired, with a stare at the fly-whisk, " might that thing be? "

"A memento of my father," said Miss Matthieu, with a lady-like sigh of wistful remembrance. " He brushed away the flies with it."

" I see," said the crew-cut young man. " Yeah. I see." His honest, manly face showed such perplexity that the old lady smiled. Her smile was singularly sweet.

" He was Governor of the Gold Coast, as it then was," she graciously explained. " Oh, a long long time ago! There were plagues of flies. It's one of my earliest memories of him, mounting his white horse, carrying this. The natives," she added gently, " adored him."

" I'll bet," said Crew-Cut warmly.

" Feared him, of course, but adored him," said Miss Matthieu. " I carry it as a memento of him, now that I'm alone in the world."

" Alone in the world? " said Crew-Cut. The sun seemed to add a sparkle to his clear eye and a multi-coloured glitter to Miss Matthieu's diamond clip. " Ma'am, that's tough."

" I have little left now but memories," said the old lady, without complaint. There was something candid and direct about the young man that broke down barriers. There was something sweet and simple in Miss Matthieu that met him halfway. They talked of her Sussex Square flat, of her budgerigars, of her souvenirs of the old Gold Coast, of her daily walks, of the little weekly treat—she gave a small blush at this, in the most charming way—which she allowed herself: tea at the Bedford Hotel, with orchestra.

" Ma'am," broke in the young man impulsively, " I'd admire to take you there one time. You remind me," he said youthfully, " of my own mom, back home in Valley Springs. My name, ma'am," he confided, " is Tom."

" How do you do, Tom? " said the old lady. " I am Miss Emily Matthieu."

" Yes, ma'am," repeated Crew-Cut. " Tom. Tom Duplessis . . ." He suddenly stopped. He stiffened. He stared. " What did you say your name was again? "

" Why, Matthieu," she repeated, surprised. She spelt it for him.

" Is . . . that . . . so, ma'am? " he asked slowly. " Matthieu? With an *i* and an *e* and a *u*? No kidding? "

The old lady drew herself slightly more erect.

" We are an old French Huguenot family."

Young Mr. Duplessis smacked one large fist into the palm of the other hand. " Well, I'll be goldurned! " he cried softly.

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" Here have I been wandering half over England . . . scratching through books and records like a dog lookin' for fleas . . ." Delighted, he became half incoherent. " Telephone directories . . . street directories . . . College of Heralds . . . And here you are, here you're a-settin' . . . Matthieu, a real dyed-in-the-wool Matthieu! " He breathed out, as if in ecstasy. " Holy cow! " he cried.

Miss Matthieu looked at him with wide-open eyes.

" Forgive a very, very personal question, ma'am," continued young Mr. Duplessis astonishingly, " but are you an unmarried lady, over the age of fifty? "

The most uncommon expression flitted for an instant over the old lady's face. It might almost have been taken for a look of awestruck pleasure; but, whatever it was, it was immediately replaced by a dignified frown.

"As you say, Mr. Duplessis, that is a very personal question indeed," she said with gentle severity. She changed the subject. " Do look at those gulls," she said.

The gulls were mobbing and squawking near the promenade rail, where a nondescript man in a raincoat was feeding them with sprats.

" Forgive me, ma'am," said young Mr. Duplessis, modestly but firmly. " But I've gotten me a job to do, and it's real important. I must ask you if you are an unmarried lady of over . . ."

" Do look at the gulls! " said Miss Matthieu again, earnestly. " They're so amusing." And indeed one of them was hovering above the hat of the nondescript man, as if about to perch.

The young man was not to be put off. " I am goin' to take it, Miss Matthieu," he said with determination, " that you are in fact over fifty, and unmarried."

" Well, yes," Miss Matthieu capitulated.

" Well, say, listen," pursued Mr. Duplessis, his young face shining with pleasure. " I've gotten quite a piece of news for you, ma'am. I am of French Huguenot stock myself, and so's all my family. Came to the States by way of England. Did you ever hear tell of my uncle on my mom's side, Raymond Matthieu? The oil king? "

" No," confessed the old lady apologetically, still watching the gulls.

" He came home to Valley Springs a rich man, still unmarried, Miss Matthieu. Very, very rich. Came home to lay his bones where our folk had lived a coupla hundred years, after leaving this old country. Fourth generation American we are, ma'am, and proud of it. But Uncle Raymond—well, he was right proud of his stock back home. And he made a will, Miss Matthieu—gee,

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it's music to me, that name, now I've found a Britisher owner for it!—which left us all a-settin' pretty. But—" and here young Mr. Duplessis went so far in enthusiasm as to tap the old lady on the knee with one emphatic forefinger—" *but*, ma'am, he had not forgotten the old folks back in the home country . . ."

He proceeded, with excited rapidity, to expound Uncle Raymond's extraordinary last will and testament. The squawking of the gulls grew louder as the nondescript man walked past the Marine Parade shelter where the two sat, but died away as the man proceeded slowly towards Black Rock.

Uncle Raymond, it seemed, had laid it as a pious duty on his nephew, Tom Duplessis, to proceed to England. " He was respectfully fond, ma'am, of ladies a little past the prime of life." Nephew Tom was to seek out any lady named Matthieu, of the old family, who was, he repeated, " unmarried and past the age of fifty." He stipulated only—" and he left this to my judgment, at which I was real proud "—that they should be honest and trustworthy. And between any such ladies there was to be divided—the young man at this point sank his voice to a low, holy tone—the sum of a hundred thousand dollars: " in your crazy currency, ma'am, that's around thirty-nine thousand pounds." And the testator had died happy, a-thinkin' of the blissful surprise of the old folk.

" He was a sentimental man, was Uncle Ray," concluded the young man, beaming with an honest pride. " He was a right sentimental man."

The old lady looked at him round-eyed, as one torn between disbelief and the purest joy.

" And to think," he burst out suddenly, " that I was 'most on my way home, without a single Matthieu lady in the order book, all set to give the whole stash to the Valley Springs Protestant Ladies' Guild!

" Why, ma'am," he suddenly burst out again, " we're kinfolk! Aunt Matthieu," he said, holding out his large open hand, " put it there! "

Aunt Matthieu delicately shook hands, the fly-whisk dangling ludicrously from her wrist.

" I can hardly believe it," she said, and clearly meant it.

" You're rich, Aunt Matthieu," he said soberly.

" But won't you—won't you want papers, and birth certificates, and things? " she ventured.

The young man dismissed this. " Later, later," he said widely. But his face became grave, and he felt in his breast pocket, and from a heavily stuffed wallet he unfolded a sheet of paper.

" There *is* one thing," he said in a sober voice. " Uncle Ray

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left a whole heap to my discretion, but he made one—what's that high-toned word? That's it—one proviso." He read it out: "And I charge the said nephew, Thomas Duplessis, to establish to his own satisfaction that the said person or persons shall be honest, trustworthy, and deserving of that confidence that should exist between blood relations of our joint and honoured stock." He folded the paper and put it away in the bulky wallet.

"And how—how would you do that?" asked Miss Matthieu, her voice trembling with anticipation.

Her young relation gave a broad and encouraging smile. "Why, Aunt Matthieu, I had that figured out. Back home in Valley Springs, we're maybe simple, honest-to-God citizens. We don't go much on lawyers and such—it's man to man with us. And I got myself a right simple way of a-fixin' this. You show you trust me, I show I trust you. Here, ma'am!"

And, extricating the paper on which was recorded his sentimental Uncle Raymond's solemnly drawn authority and proviso, he pushed his bulging wallet into her hands.

"What am I meant to do with this?" asked the old lady, blinking with sun or bewilderment, or both.

"I show I trust you first. There's a coupla thousand dollars there, maybe. Just you walk a piece along there—" and he waved his hand westward along the promenade— "anywheres out of my sight. Take it easy. And come back to me here. I'll be here, thanking the good God I've succeeded in findin' a real genuine Matthieu. Just walk," he urged.

"It seems so silly," said the old lady; but she half rose from the seat in the shelter.

"Oh, come on, Aunt Matthieu!" pressed the young man, with an affectionate and compulsive grin.

"It's such a lot of money," protested the old lady. But she was on her feet now, and bravely she set off along Marine Parade westward, away from the town, clutching the wallet in both hands inside her fur coat.

Even on this strange errand, she was well-mannered, as every lady should be. "Good morning," she said to retired Colonels. "Good morning," she said to the other old ladies. "Good morning. A beautiful day," she said graciously to the nondescript man in his raincoat, who had run out of sprats and was no longer surrounded by gulls. "Good morning, dear," she said to a little girl on roller skates. She walked into the blue-and-silver distance of the Brighton morning.

In the shelter, young Mr. Duplessis relaxed, whistled an inaudible tune, closed his eyes, and waited, with a faint smile on his open face.

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Within ten minutes, she was back. She sat down at the young man's side. "I'm a little breathless," she said with a self-conscious laugh. "The excitement, perhaps." She pushed the wallet into his hands. "Do count it," she urged.

The young man riffled briefly but carefully through the wallet "All in order, ma'am! That's dandy!" He put it away and smiled, amused. "As if I needed any tellin' you was as honest as Mom's blueberry pie!" He rose energetically. "Well, I'll be a-goin' straight to the Telegraph Office to send a cable to Valley Springs. This'll be a great day in my home town, Aunt Matthieu."

"But don't I have to show I trust you?" asked Miss Matthieu.

"What's that, ma'am?"

"I mean," said the old lady, "isn't it my turn to show that I trust you now?"

Young Mr. Duplessis gave a robust but musical laugh. "Well, holy smoke!" he said, shaking his close-cropped head. "I was clear forgettin' that part of the deal! Well," he frowned, "how shall we aim to fix that?"

"I must give you something. Then you must walk away out of sight and come back," recited the old lady with animation, looking amazingly like one little girl telling another the rules of a game. "But—" and here she inspected her purse of green leather, with its gold border—"I seem to have only two pounds or so on me. I know! Shall we go to my bank and cash a cheque? So that you can walk away right out of my sight?"

"Why," protested Mr. Duplessis, "that's puttin' you to a whole heap of trouble. It's a formality, that's all. Maybe you have a watch . . . a ring, or somep'n?"

His eye travelled over her. "Why, Aunt Matthieu," he said, "that's a purty little brooch you're wearin' on your lapel. Guess maybe that's enough, between kinfolk. Gee, it's only a symbol!"

"It's diamonds," replied Miss Matthieu, beaming. She unfastened it, and laid it in his hand.

"Well, what do you know!" said the young man, awed. "That's the sorta hick I am—wouldn't know a pearl from a pigeon's egg!" He turned it in his hand and frowned. "Maybe it's too valuable . . .?"

"Oh, do go on and walk with it! Please, Tom!" she cried, and the fly-whisk swung as she clapped her hands together in innocent pleasure. "Do go! Do go and walk out of sight!"

Young Mr. Duplessis smiled back at her. "O.K., O.K., Aunt Matthieu," he replied. He took out a large white handkerchief, folded it round the diamond clip, and put it reverently away in his inside pocket. "See you in five minutes!"

He marched stoutly off eastward, to the town. At the next

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shelter, he stopped, turned, and waved reassuringly. But Miss Matthieu was not watching him. She sat with her eyes closed, her face raised to the sun, lost in a dream-like rapture.

Five minutes passed . . . Ten minutes passed . . .

As young Mr. Duplessis stepped out of his cab at Brighton station, a black saloon car drew up behind the cab. The young man paid his driver, and turned to see in front of him the nondescript man in a raincoat, and by his side a burly man in a black overcoat, with a homburg hat. They moved heavily but swiftly to either side of him.

"Well, Charley-boy, how's business?" asked the burly man.

The young man swallowed, looked round for escape, saw none, gave a haggard smile, and replied, "Mustn't grumble, ta."

The nondescript man put his hand in the young man's inside pocket, carefully drew out the handkerchief, and handed it to the burly man, who unfolded it and tossed the diamond clip lightly in his huge fist.

"There's one born every minute, Charley-boy, isn't there?" he mused. Bystanders began to gather. "Well, shall we take a ride and see your old lady?"

Miss Matthieu opened her eyes to see the three men standing before her, with the nondescript man's hand lightly but firmly holding the arm in the homespun sleeve. Her look became at once alert and innocent. The burly man held out the diamond clip. "We are police officers, madam," said the burly man with courtesy. She blinked at him.

"Do you identify this as your property?"

"Why, yes," said Miss Matthieu, but continued in the same breath, "I mean to say, no."

"No?"

"I mean, it *was* mine. It was given to me," said the old lady garrulously, "by my father, who was Governor of the Gold Coast, as it then was. But this morning," she said, "I made a present of it to—my young friend here. I have known him since he was—" and here she indicated the height with the fly-whisk—"so high. It is for his future wife. He is," she explained earnestly, "about to be married."

"What, Charley-boy married?" asked the burly man in honest astonishment. And then, in despair, "But you intend to make a charge, madam, surely! Don't," he pleaded, "tell me you make no charge!"

The old lady drew herself regally erect. "Charge?" she asked, in tones of outrage. "Charge? Against Charles? Whom I have known since he was so high?"

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The three stared at her. The young man's stare was, of the three, the most bewildered. If the Marine Parade shelter itself had got up and started walking away, he could not have looked more dumbfounded.

"But . . ." said the two police officers in unison. They argued, pleaded, cajoled. They gave Miss Matthieu a short but vivid account of Charley-boy's past career, beginning from Borstal. They grew vehement.

The old lady suddenly cut them short.

"Please," she said.

"No more," she said, with gentle firmness.

"Be so good," she demanded, with an imperious wave of the fly-whisk, a gesture worthy of the daughter of a Colonial administrator, "as to restore his property to this gentleman."

The burly man, with a hopeless glance at his colleague in the raincoat, held out the diamond clip to the young man.

"Take it, Charles," said Miss Matthieu with authority. He took it with the air of a sleepwalker. "And now run along, Charles," she added. "These gentlemen have made a stupid mistake and delayed you long enough."

The young man took the diamond clip and put it in his pocket, still in a dream of disbelief. Suddenly the burly man, staring at Miss Matthieu, frowned. His eye lit up. He whistled softly.

"And go, Charles. Go at once. And don't come back," said Miss Matthieu. She waved towards Brighton town with her whisk.

The young man moved his mouth, but no sound came. He turned, he walked some yards, still with the look of sleepwalking . . .

And then he ran. He ran past the promenade strollers, past wheelchairs, past schoolgirls and prams; he ran, and was lost to sight. But the burly man did not watch him go. He continued to fix the old lady with his eye.

He spoke at last, in a wondering voice. "Minnie Bates," he said. "Minnie Bates. Alias Mrs. Buxton-Rogers. Alias the Prinzessen von und zu Something-or-other. Alias Miss Thorpe of Wolverhampton. Alias Lady Moira Mountjoy. Sent you down for a stretch myself at Lewes, 1938: confidence trick and false pretences. Ditto: Old Bailey, 1947. Lewes, York, Ipswich—insufficient evidence. Minnie Bates."

"Sorry to see you still working. I've retired," said the old lady cheerfully. "How's all down on your manor, detective-sergeant?"

"Superintendent," said the burly man shortly, scowling.

"Glad you've done well," said Miss Matthieu graciously. She

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gathered up her novel and handbag. " Well, I must toddle. Got to arrange the flowers at St. Simon's." She paused. " Will you be seeing that young man again? "

" He's been our way before," replied the superintendent grimly, " and he'll come our way again."

" Tip him the office from me," said Miss Matthieu. " His Yank stuff was awful. Said he was Middle-West and talked half Southern. His fake dollars—I had a look at 'em in his wallet—were lousy: tell him to go to Joey Winterbotham, at the Angel . . . Oh, but the approach! The zest! The flair! Cripes," said Miss Matthieu, carried away, " it was fair lovely! He's got it in him, that boy. He'll go far. Oh, but I love to see young uns coming into the old lark, all fresh! " She prepared to rise.

The superintendent made one final protest, in outrage.

" But hell, Minnie! " he almost shouted. " He's done it off with your piece of diamonds! "

Miss Matthieu rose. " Of course," she replied. " He'll need capital. I'm very comfortably off and I was very glad to give it him. A boy of promise like him."

She twirled the fly-whisk airily. " Like his Uncle Raymond back in Valley Springs," she said, " I'm right sentimental."

She walked off, every inch a lady.

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" . . . she loathes me, she loathes me not . . . "

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the yellow fishcart

By LESLIE GORDON BARNARD

I WAS a boy at the time, but I can still remember the atmosphere of mystery and terror that haunted me during that holiday at the sea. I can remember sitting with my hands locked about my knees, listening to my elders tell of the girl whose body was found down by the cliff face where, on bright days with the clean winds blowing, I had thought no ill thing could happen. I remember that, later, everybody took on their lips the name of Millie Jones.

Millie helped with the chores in the cottage of old Angus, the fisherman, where my parents took lodgings. A freckled, homely slip of a girl she was and, as I know now, one of the meek who have not yet quite managed to inherit the earth. Then she seemed to me one of the immortals because daily she drove the yellow two-wheeled fishcart to the wharf and brought back a shining load of fish for the local market.

Old Angus had a daughter, Sophie. I think she must have been very pretty; Millie said she was. Perhaps because Millie knew that it was unlikely any romance would ever come her own way, she worshipped Sophie and enjoyed vicariously her love affairs, of which there were quite a few, I gathered, until Joe Green came into the picture.

People said she had caught him on the rebound. I puzzled over that; but, having seen Joe and Sophie more than once when they thought they were alone, I knew at least that she had caught him good and tight. When I asked Millie what rebound

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meant, she said she guessed it was along of Joe having gone first with Jeanne Adams who had a quarrel with him and broke things off. It didn't occur to Millie or to me, then, how dark a shadow that quarrel was to cast over Joe and Sophie or how, in the end, Millie was to be mixed up in it so strangely.

Even now I can recall what terror infected me when people spoke of Jeanne Adams and of what had happened to her. They talked always in whispers when she was mentioned and I was near, but spoke more loudly and openly of the inquest and of Joe Green's part in it.

I asked Millie, because anything I wanted to know I asked her, but all she said was, " Joe, he wouldn't never do such an awful thing, but people know how he quarrelled with her, and then it was bad Llew Hardy and Al Sholtz finding him that way. And it was worse, him running off the way he done. He should've stayed and faced it. I only hope he comes back himself before they go and fetch him."

Millie had her wish. Joe came back.

I remember the night well, with rain coming in from the sea and the wind back of it; he was soaked and shivering when he reached old Angus' back door. I'd gone out to see about some fishing tackle and I almost ran into them.

There was Sophie hanging on to Joe, and Joe saying, " You don't believe it of me, do you? " and Sophie just shaking her head and burying it on his wet shoulder.

Then Joe said, " It's true I was with Jeanne that evening, but it just happened I met her on the road and we walked along together, like. We went out there past Llew Hardy's place and Al Sholtz' cabin, and then we came to the lighthouse path and I turned off alone and left her to go on. I swear I was alone," Joe said.

" I went and lay in the grass above the cliff and wished you were with me, and by and by it got darker and the stars came out, and then—then I heard the scream. I ran, and after a while I—I found her. That's how I was kneeling beside her body when Al and Llew came to see if anything was wrong. I swear to God, Sophie—"

Maybe I shouldn't have listened even that much, but when you're a kid, and people keep hushing up whenever you come near, your ears get big. I didn't know then what it meant, but I guessed whatever it was about Jeanne Adams was pretty awful.

Joe gave himself up that night, and I heard he was in gaol up at the county town. I'd seen the building, with its barred windows, and I thought how different it must be to look out on just a dusty square when your eyes had always known the wide blue

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spaces of the sea. I asked Millie would they hang Joe Green, and when, and she looked frightened and said I mustn't speak so.

Millie was a queer one in some ways. I said my prayers like any kid who'd been taught to; but Millie just talked to God as if He was in the room; I'd hear her at it sometimes when I passed her bedroom door. "What we need," I heard her say, "is a miracle, because this is awful hard on Sophie and Joe. They're nice decent people and they love each other just like You want people should and they're sure in a bad spot."

That was the day before the trial when, I heard it said, Llew Hardy and Al Sholtz would be the chief witnesses.

Much as I wanted to, I wasn't allowed to go. The trial lasted two days, and both days and all night the rain was heavy, and the windows shook in the wind, and somewhere along the coast they said a ship had sent up distress rockets. I felt as if even the weather was making it hard for Sophie and Joe, and by the way people talked and shook their heads, and by the look on Millie's face, I could see that things were going badly.

Then a juror was taken ill and they adjourned the court for forty-eight hours, and I heard the girls talking about it.

"I can't stand it, Millie," Sophie said, "I can't stand the waiting."

But Millie told her, "Listen, Sophie, I been prayin' awful hard for you and Joe. Maybe it was God made this fellow take ill, you never know."

I wanted to laugh at the idea of God making a man sick because of Millie, but Sophie just cried, and I crept away because I didn't like to hear her crying.

Next day the sun came out for a time, and it felt good after the wind and rain; it was bright over the sea in the afternoon, and I went out and walked.

I went past the fishmarket where every day Millie came with her cartload of fish from the wharf, and down past the Baptist Church and the Masonic Hall and Dr. Gunter's surgery. Everywhere people were talking about the trial, until you could almost see the rope round Joe's neck.

I felt pretty bad about it as I went along the shore road towards the lighthouse, thinking of how Joe had come this way that awful night. I might have been scared of the road but the sea was blue and bright, so I went right out to where Joe said he had been that night and I stood there looking round. I could see the bay and the fish wharf, and the road winding white past Llew Hardy's where the clothes-lines were always full of kids' garments, and past Al Sholtz' cabin with his nets out drying. I

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went and looked at the place where they said Jeanne Adams was found, and I wondered what was so terrible about it all, except that she was dead.

Away off I could see the boats coming, and then I saw the women and girls assembling by the fish-houses, and I ran down, meaning to see them bring the day's catch in. There was a creak of wheels and, sure enough, it was the yellow two-wheeled fishcart bright in the sunlight. I'd often asked Millie why she didn't oil the wheels, and she said she guessed she would sometime.

" I'm going over to see them land the fish," I told her.

Because I had on a suit of clothes my mother wouldn't want me to get all smelling of fish, I didn't get into the cart but walked behind it across the causeway and out on to the wharf. I remember that by the time we got to the slip where the boats would tie up the sunlight had faded and a mist began to come in from the open sea.

It was always fun to watch them land the catch; the boats would snub against the slimy green piles and the fishermen would take their two-pronged forks and toss the fish up. The fish would slither across the scaly boards to where old Angus lifted them with his own fork into the first tub. From that the women and girls would take them, slitting, gutting, passing them through successive waters until they reached the salting vat. Now and again old Angus would set aside a special fish for Millie to put into her cart for sale at the local market.

When Angus saw me, he grunted, " Now don't you get dirtied up, young feller, or your ma will be after my scalp," so I sat on a bollard at a little distance and watched them. Presently, they began to talk about Joe Green, and I wished they wouldn't. I wanted to enjoy the fish . . .

One after another the boats came in, and about the last to come was Al Sholtz. I can see him now, standing with his seaboots in the sludge on the floor of his boat, tossing the fish with an easy motion of his arms which were bare to the shoulder and tattooed with anchors and a ship and a woman with a tail like a fish.

I kept looking at him and at Llew Hardy, thinking how they'd found Joe by Jeanne Adams' body and how people said Joe and Sophie needn't look for any sympathy from those two.

They said that, to Llew, love and marriage meant a lot of kids underfoot and a full clothes-line and empty pockets; and that, as for Al, he was a bachelor, kind of sunk inside himself, to whom young love was only something to keep a sharp and doubtful eye on.

I remember how fast the daylight faded, and how the mist

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became a fog blowing in from the sea and striking with a chill that, young as I was, I felt to my marrow and wished I'd brought a jacket; so I got up and went to the end of the wharf to see the tide swirling in, and when I came back I knew, even before I heard the actual words, that they were talking about Joe again.

Al Sholtz was saying, " Listen now, I don't want to hear no more of this. If Joe hangs, as he damn likely will, it's because he done what he done, not because of Llew and me. There was nothin' we could do but speak the naked truth of it."

And Llew Hardy said, " Sure, we was under oath, wasn't we? "

" Aye," agreed old Angus, and he nodded his head gravely, " that's so, lads."

" We spoke nothin' but what we saw with our own eyes," Al said.

Then Millie spoke up. She said, " There's two ways of saying things. It wasn't drug out of you like you hated to say it. You spoke like you'd be glad to see Joe Green hang."

They all stopped working then and looked as surprised as if one of the fish in the tubs had popped up to make a remark; it wasn't at all like Millie to talk up in company, because she was the silent sort and humble as her own homeliness.

I thought, She's made an enemy of Al Sholtz and I guess of Llew, too. Youngster as I was, I remember deciding then that it is the people you think you can kick around who come out strongest when you least expect it.

I looked at Millie, and I could see she was awed at what she'd said, but she wasn't taking any of it back. Her snub nose was more than ever in retreat, and her eyes were frightened, but she stood up to them all. " Joe," Millie said, " he never did this thing to Jeanne. I ought to know," she said.

" What talk is this? " cried old Angus, but he stared at her like the others.

" I'm just saying I know," said Millie.

" Just what is it you know? "

" I know that *somebody else done it.*"

I'll never forget the feeling I had, or the way she said those words, or how everybody went tense and waited as if they expected her right there and then to name the person; but they got no more out of her. The louder the women shrilled and the harder the men stared at her, the more Millie shrank back into herself, until old Angus quieted them at last.

" Enough of this," he said. " Whatever it is that Millie knows, this is neither time nor place to hear it. Get on with the fish now, it's darkenin' fast and the fog's comin' in thick."

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For quite a while after that nobody dared speak again; it was Al Sholtz, I remember, who had a sudden word of warning. He said, " I'm just thinking if there's truth in the girl's talk, then Joe Green's innocent, and it stands to reason if that's so, which I don't admit, the person who did it is still on the loose. I'm thinking that with the dark and the fog it'll be wise for none of our womenfolk here to go home alone."

" There's sense in that," nodded old Angus, and I felt a cold prickling down my spine and, what with the fog and all, I sneezed. Angus looked up sharply. " You boy," he said, " along home with you before the dark comes full. Away with you now."

I was afraid to go. I was more afraid than ever when I got out on the road and saw how thickly the fog was caught in the trees and the hollows, and all the whisperings came back to me and what Al Sholtz had said, and I wished I hadn't come. Then I decided what I would do: I would wait until I heard Millie come along with the cart, and I would go home with her even if it meant that I'd get my clothes all smelling of fish.

It's queer, when you think of it, that nobody remembered Millie, who had been loading her cart with fish when Al Sholtz spoke his warning, or worried about her having to go home alone. If they did think anything of it, I suppose they thought that Millie would be safe, being so homely and all.

I waited for her, but she didn't come. Others went by in groups, but I kept well out of sight, being scared of old Angus, and at last their footfalls died away. It got darker and foggier, and I wished Millie would hurry.

Up above the fog there must have been some daylight still; I could hear the gulls screaming. After that I listened hard, but there was only the moaning of the foghorn. And then, at last, I heard the sound of creaking wheels, yet different, as if it wasn't Millie's cart coming along, but the ghost of a cart.

I thought of *Treasure Island* and the sound of a peg-leg tapping down a street by the sea. I remembered how when I'd read it first the tap-tapping seemed to be in our own street and then on our stairs, and how I sat up, forgetting the book on my knee, and listening—but there was only the sound of my own heart going too fast and too loud. The creaking of the cart was like that now, and I greatly wished myself back at old Angus' place, safe and warm by the fire.

Presently, I could just make out something looming up in the fog and I called twice, my voice almost sticking in my throat. " Millie," I called, " Millie! "—and the cart stopped.

" God help us," said Millie. " I thought you was safe at home

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by now." She told me to get up beside her, and I was quick, in spite of my clothes and the fish, to put my foot on the hub and grab hold of the high wooden side and pull myself up. There was a narrow seat across in front and when I sat on it my feet went far enough down to feel the slithery piles of fish.

"You're shiverin'," Millie said, and I told her I was cold.

"Just cold?"

"A bit scared, too, Millie," I acknowledged.

"That's honest," Millie said. "Here, maybe you'd like to drive."

I was glad to take the reins. Millie sat beside me and I could hardly see her face. "Millie," I said, "what is it you know?"

"What do I know about what?"

"Who did—did *it*—to Jeanne," I said, and I thought, with the gooseflesh pimpling out all over me, that it must have happened right near here.

"I wish to heaven I knew," Millie said.

"But, Millie, you said—you told them—"

"What did I say?"

"You said you knew who did it."

"I never said no such a thing. I said I knew Joe never done it. I said I knew somebody else done it, and of course I knew somebody else must have done it. I had to say something. It made me just sick, hearin' them talk that way against Joe. So I just up and spoke."

That made me feel kind of gone inside, because I'd expected a lot of Millie after what she had said, and I knew very well the others had, too. I tried to tell Millie how it was—that they all thought she really knew and could name the person. Millie just laughed, a funny little sound in her throat. I told her that even Al Sholtz had weakened and begun to wonder if the womenfolk should go home alone; then I fell silent.

Neither of us talked much after that, and the creaking of the cart seemed louder and lonelier than ever. Whenever I hear a noise like that, even now, I can feel the cold fog against my cheeks, and my spine prickles when I remember how, going up a slight rise, the cart stopped creaking. "Get on, Duke," Millie cried, but Duke didn't get on.

I was just going to shout at the horse, too, but I didn't; it came to me somehow, because as yet I couldn't see a thing, that Duke hadn't stopped of his own accord, that somebody had stopped him, somebody who was groping back towards the cart and us. I don't think the tap-tapping of a peg-leg ever sounded more frightening than the scrabbling of those hands trying to get a grip on the high wooden sides of Millie's yellow fishcart.

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Millie didn't scream, but I heard her breath coming short and sharp, and then I felt her taut body move in a swift, sudden act. I knew what it was. I knew by the sound of the blade quivering in wood that she had struck with her fish-knife. Then, catching the reins from me, she lashed Duke and the horse broke into a gallop. She kept lashing him as I am sure she had never done before, and Duke's hoofs beat into the sand of the road as if the devil himself were after us. We didn't speak, either of us, until the village lights ahead of us made us feel we could breathe again.

"Millie," I said, "do—do you suppose that was *him*?"

"Yes," Millie said, "and I only wish I'd seen him so as I'd know."

When we passed a street light I saw her face and it was white as a sheet. She said I should go home at once and get a hot drink, and not tell anyone—yet. She said she'd go on to the fishmarket and get rid of her load.

I heard the cart creaking on down the street and I went into the house and ran upstairs, and I was never so glad in my life to see familiar things—the three-master old Angus had carved and rigged for me, a decorated shell I'd bought from a pedlar, and some fossils from the cliff face near where they had found poor Jeanne Adams.

By and by I went down to get warm by the fire that was lit in the front room, and Sophie was there. She looked up but I don't think she even saw me. I wanted to tell her I was sorry, but instead I backed out and went to the kitchen, and so I was there when Millie came in.

I knew right away that something was up. She was looking sick and queer, and when she saw me she said, "I want you to come with me, right away."

I didn't ask where or why; I just went, and for some reason my heart was beating lickety-clip. We went past the chapel and the hall, and when we got to Dr. Gunter's surgery with a light burning in the round globe and his name on it, Millie almost dragged me up the steps.

Mrs. Gunter opened the door for us. She said, yes, the doctor was in, but he was busy for a moment with a patient and for us to sit in the waiting-room. She glanced from me to Millie, and I saw an odd look come on her face. She said, "Why what's the matter, Millie, have you cut your hand?"

Millie stared down at her closed fist and I saw that there was blood on it, and I remember how, as if she couldn't stand it any longer, she opened her hand then.

Mrs. Gunter gave a little cry, and I hung on to the side of my chair, trying not to look and yet not able to turn away.

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"I'm sorry to bother the doctor," Millie said, "but I didn't know who else to go to with it. I want him to tell me what I should do. It was when I was unloading the fish," Millie said, "that I saw it."

Just then we heard the side door of the surgery close, and knew the doctor had seen his patient out. The door into the waiting-room opened and Dr. Gunter came in. If he had seen Millie and me right off I suppose he would not have said what he did to Mrs. Gunter.

Boy as I was, I knew then. I knew why Millie might have been found on the road just like poor Jeanne Adams was. I saw that there are strange weavings that work things out sometimes, and I knew that Millie had wrought her own humble but effective miracle for Sophie and Joe.

Not seeing us, the doctor looked at his wife and laughed, and said, "Well, I've seen plenty of accidents to people's hands before today without their owners looking as if death on horseback were after them. Why the devil should a hardbitten fellow like Al Sholtz be all caved in because he's lost a couple of fingers?"

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LEISURE PLEASURE

Strictly for fun, a rhyming quiz. Each clue leads to two words, each of two syllables, which rhyme in both their syllables. i.e. "Mention pension" qualifies, but not "Mention truncheon."

A few of the clues are slightly contrived, but still recognisable. An example of clue and answer:
Cricketer's fastenings—Hutton's buttons (or Grace's braces).

1. *The result of two days' failure to shave*
2. *Useful liquor*
3. *Less sensitive cow*
4. *Sticky tobacco*
5. *Mme Charrier's fingers*
6. *Prolific tortoise*
7. *Red hat*
8. *Lowly depression*
9. *Drooping flower*
10. *Decorate more rapidly*
11. *Correct policeman*
12. *Less accomplished collector of grain*
13. *Lesser offspring*
14. *Gosh! the nymph*
15. *Loftier thorn*
16. *Larger eel*
17. *Dinner story*
18. *Staggering vagabond*
19. *Cowardly graduate*
20. *Dull the gloss*

Answers next month.

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SPANISH KID

Would they call it theft,
I wondered, or madness?

BY DARRELL BATES

THE road that curls and zigzags up to Ronda is a good place in the early spring for flowers. You find wild orchids there in the meadows and hedges, and growing in the cracks and ledges of the limestone cliffs there are, for a week or two, delicately trumpeted daffodils.

We didn't often pick them. It seemed a shame somehow to cut off such complicated colourful things in their brief moment of beauty. But sometimes we would dig up the bulbs and carry them away to plant them in our garden. It was this that we were doing, perched on a ledge high above the road, when the motor cycle went by.

We had watched it coming up the road, buzzing like an angry bluebottle as it attacked the upward slope. We didn't see the box on the back until it was just below our ledge.

"What a shame!" Susie was thirteen and she made all the troubles and sadnesses of every small animal her own.

"Look!" she said. "A baby goat. Poor thing!"

It certainly looked a sad little goat. Its head hung over the side of the box, and its forelegs as well, like a sack of early potatoes. There wasn't even a bleat as the motor cycle and the man and the box went round the corner and were lost to view.

"Poor goat," said Susie; using her bare toes on the rock, she inched up towards the daffodil and started prising out the bulb.

In this part of southern Spain the people live together in small compact villages, and round the villages are the fields and the figs and the almond trees. In between the villages the country is eroded and bare. When you have left the villages behind there is nothing but rock and an empty silence, and vultures, waiting and watchful in the sky.

In the pass the road is narrow and it curls and twists a lot, and I drove slowly. And suddenly coming round a corner we saw it there, kneeling in the dust.

It got up when it heard and saw the car, and turned and moved away.

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"Oh, stop! Please stop." Susie's hand was already on the catch, and she was out of the door and on the road even before I brought the car to a standstill.

"It's the same one, I'm sure." She had it in her arms now, looking for a patch of colour or a flaw that she could use to prove, to me at least, that it really was the motor-cycle goat.

It must have fallen out of the box, we thought, and the man occupied with his thoughts and perhaps the angry buzz of his machine hadn't heard or felt its fall. There was a cut over one eye, and dust over the face and neck—and in all the empty wilderness of rock there wasn't a sign of any other goat. There wasn't even the sound of a bleat or the call of a goatherd.

"Can we take it? Can we?" The creature was already in the back of the car, on Susie's lap, the cut eye bathed and the dust softly smoothed away.

A few moments and a few protests later we were on our way, climbing still on the winding road to Ronda.

"If we see the owner we must give it back."

"Yes, I know..." Each time we saw a man or heard a motorbikey noise a pair of anxious eyes stared out and then relaxed.

"No. That's not him." Until soon there was Ronda spread out and poised on its cliff below us, and it began to look as if we might never see the owner after all.

The goat was asleep now. About two days old, we thought, or three. Its cord was still attached, and it sucked hopefully at Susie's fingers.

"What," I said later as we drew up opposite a likely-looking shop, "is the Spanish for a baby's teat?"

In the end Susie went into the shop herself, and I held the goat. A little crowd collected to admire and ask a lot of questions while I waited in the car.

"Look," said a small girl, her eyes as black as olives and her face as oval, "the man has a baby goat. Can it be true?"

"Yes," I said, looking to see if Susie was coming back from the shop. "It is true. It is a baby goat."

"What a curious thing," they chirped. "What a very curious thing. To see a foreigner with a baby goat."

I could see from Susie's smile as she crossed the road that she had got one. She had a bottle too.

"They were very nice about it," she said as we drove on over the bridge. "As soon as I explained that we were English they seemed to understand."

"What," I asked again, just for the record, "is the word for teat?"

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" I don't know. We didn't use the word. We . . . Anyway we got one, didn't we? "

" Yes," I said, " we did."

The Guardia at the crossroads waved us on with a scowl at the pedestrians in the road and a smile at Susie in the car. When he saw the goat his expression changed.

Would they call it theft? I wondered as I put my foot on the accelerator. Or madness? But no whistle sounded behind us, nor a shout, and soon we were round the corner and in the road that led to the hotel.

The hotel at Ronda has a wonderful view and an excellent white wine, running, as they say in Spanish, from the barrel. The hotel itself was built in about 1900 and equipped then with the most up-to-date beds and curtains and other things that hotels have. Some of them are still there, at least they were when I was last at Ronda, and what's more they still work. Not every day perhaps, but as often at any rate as some of the things that have been put in since.

It is nevertheless an enchanting place in many ways and one has the feeling that even the staff, except the kitchenmaids who are new, have grown up with the hotel, and mellowed with it.

I had been there before and I remembered this, but when Susie asked what they would think about the goat when we arrived I wasn't sure what the answer would be.

" I think it would be better," I said, cowardice and cunning combining to make a comprehensive plan, " if you went on ahead with the goat and explained . . ."

" Would you mind—" Susie told me afterwards she had said— " if we kept this goat in our room? He is only a little one, and he has lost his mother . . ." Her voice had trailed off, partly with uncertainty, and partly calculated pathos.

" But of course," they said at once, " if the senorita wishes to have the goat in her room . . ." Their hands sketched in the air the absurdity of thinking that there could possibly be any other reply.

" You can come now," my daughter said, poking her head and her grin round the corner.

" Good," I said, and started taking the bags out of the back of the car. As I handed them to the old man waiting there I wondered whether there was any other country in the world— and in Spain, any other place than Andalusia—where goats would be so readily and so disarmingly admitted.

While I handed in the passports and talked about the weather, Susie was discussing more important things with the porter and a waiter and an advance party of maids from the kitchen.

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"Well," said the waiter who was well over seventy and ought to know, "you should really feed it on goat's milk. If you wish I will get some . . ."

"It is better," one of the kitchenmaids said with firm dissent, "to feed a baby goat on the milk of the cow. In that way it will be more tranquil in the night."

Another kitchenmaid did not agree. It was too rich, she said. But she didn't look like a country girl, and no one took much notice of what she said.

The trouble was of course that the little goat wouldn't take any milk of any sort. We tried it with the bottle first but it spat out the teat and bleated faintly when we squeezed milk by mistake over its nose and eyes. It wouldn't even take liquid from a spoon. While I unpacked, Susie and the upstairs maid tried for half an hour, and in the end with one holding the head and the other the spoon they got a few mouthfuls in.

"Do you think he will die?" Susie asked.

I thought it would and I said, "Yes, it might," if only in case it did.

"Where will he sleep?" Susie asked, looking at her bed.

"No," I said.

Susie looked at the maid and they started a conversation in the patois that was too fast and too involved for me to follow.

"Why," said Susie at the end of it, "don't you go down and have a drink? You must be tired after all that driving."

"All right," I said. The children had on the whole brought me up quite well. I remembered too the quality of the hotel wine.

About an hour later, when I was sitting in the bar beside a fire of wood and smoke, Susie came down. With her, bleating now on a happier note, was the little goat.

"Oi, que bonito!" said the barman, and opened for Susie a bottle of lemonade.

The goat went to the fire and sniffed it and settled down, knees first, on the hearth rug. The others in the bar, a Spaniard who bred bulls, his wife, and a naval officer on leave from Gibraltar, were enchanted.

"This hotel," said the Spaniard to his wife, "is usually rather dull. It's full of old ladies and Englishmen," and then catching the eye of the barman and a whispered aside ". . . and Americans," he added, to soften the blow. In case he had given offence he came over later and told me how beautiful my daughter was.

"We got it to take the bottle," Susie explained, "in the end." Her arms I saw were flecked with milk—and the end of her nose.

A gong echoed then from innards of the hotel. The bar was a

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more modern addition and the noise came to us from the main part of the building like something from the past, a mummified corpse or a fragment of a pterodactyl's wing.

"Can we take him in to dinner?" The "we" was thrown in with subtle emphasis.

"No," I said. Goats, I already knew from the journey in the car and a brief session in the room upstairs, are leaky animals and difficult to train.

It was some time before she came down again.

"The trouble was," she explained at dinner, "that as soon as I left the room he started to bleat. He seems to think I'm his mum. However," she added, spearing a radish, "in the end he went to sleep and I tiptoed out of the room. The maid says that every ten minutes or so she will listen at the door in case he wakes and wants me."

I wondered where exactly he had gone to sleep, and how much the hotel blankets cost. But I needn't have worried. Susie and the maid, I found later when I went upstairs, had pulled out a drawer and put it on the floor. That and my dressing-gown made quite a passable crib. The goat at any rate was fast asleep.

Next morning we went out looking for some goat's milk for the journey home. The goat had, to put it mildly, survived the night and looked like surviving many more.

"Goat's milk?" said the first person we asked. "For the English senorita's baby goat?" It seemed as if everyone in Ronda knew the story already. We were surprised that no one had come to claim it. Even if the owner didn't come himself we half expected a small queue of impostors, any of whom, we knew, could have successfully extracted some pesetas from us, if only to save the goat from a fate worse than kid gloves. When one has shared a room with a goat for a time one begins to get attached to it.

When the luggage was in the car, and the back seat had been suitably prepared, Susie went up to fetch the goat. Several of the other guests and most of the ground floor staff were waiting in the porch to see it off. There were few among them who hadn't contributed something or some advice to the goat's wellbeing. We had one way and another learnt a lot about goats in the last twenty-four hours.

Susie came out at last through the porch and the arch of people assembled there, looking rather like the season's bride, I thought, with her train of maids and her rapturous smile. Until, that is, her escort spent a penny on the mat.

When they were safely in the car I went in to pay the bill. It

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was very reasonable considering, but one item in particular caught my eye. In the line marked " Bebidas," below all the wine I had drunk the night before, was a sort of footnote.

" For drinks." it said, " supplied for one little goat . . . five pesetas."

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WAHOO!

The fish I caught in the Spanish Main
Was a wahoo as thick as your thigh . . .
And what did I hear the fellow say
Who was running the show for millionaires ?
Do they still fish shrimps out of Bawley Bay ?
And boil 'em afloat down Gravesend way ?

Caribbean sun on the huge wahoo !
Conch-shell isles in a glitter of haze !
Shrimp needs rain just like land do
The grey voice grates from the grey wet days,
The voice that spits at Tilbury Ferry,
At the Ship and Lobster at Denton too,
Shrimp's no go till after the cherry.
Where Pocohontas lies on a hill,
And all the sea traffic of London rides,
Where the bricks and mortar cease to spill,
Where the orchards blow in sight of the tides,
There come the shrimpers from Bawley still.

So must I come to the Spanish Main,
To black boys grinning and more lines spinning,
Trolling for huge wahoo again,
Thick as your thigh for millionaires,
Just for a sniff of Sea Reach in the rain,
Where the smell of the sea is just beginning
But thousands of river smells remain.

O conch-shell isles and Caribbean sun !
Where the lord fish strike and the Gulf currents run !
How long did I dream of the glitter and gold
Of a long line spun
For a huge wahoo ?
Only to remember, only to be told
How the cherry blows in sight of the tides,
How the shrimp needs rain, just like land do,
Where the grey sea traffic of London rides.

JOHN PUDNEY, *A Ballad of Reminders*

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COME TO THE FAIR

Senor Pedro kept the auction bubbling like a lukewarm kettle

BY JOAN AIKEN

GAY and glorious, one day every year, the market square of this little town is, and that's the day in September when the fair comes, and music peals, and roundabouts whirl, and the through-traffic, if it wants to get by, has to give the town a miss and scrape along sidelanes past sodden blackberry hedges. Though where through-traffic should be going don't ask me, for beyond the town, up the mountain, stands nothing but the water-tower, on its one leg like a broody heron, and the castle of Owen Richards the poet; beyond again, and all round for that matter, lie only the mountains, heaving their mossy shoulders into the rain and the mist.

On Fair Day, then, the big roundabout takes up all the centre of the town square with its horses and swans and dragons, while round it thick as currants in a birthday cake crowd the sideshows and stalls and rifle-galleries, not to mention Jones the Rope Trick, the lovely fortune-telling Myfanwy and, this year we are speaking of, Senor Pedro.

Senor Pedro was a wizened little man, nose like a parrot, eyes like chips of anthracite, hair a mere wisp at the back of his head, and a walnut-shell face that was wrinkled and seamed all over as if, every night, he slept face down on a doormat.

Indeed, he was talking about his face, standing on a big box in front of his little tent. The box was wreathed about with pink paper, and on the tent hung a banner:

Agua de Vida, Water of Life

"You see my face, senores, senoras?" he was shouting to the crowd. "Wrinkled, you think, my friends, but you are wrong. My face was scratched by thorns, yes, thorns—those very thorns that the South American pygmies use to tip their arrows. On the slopes of the Andes, your honours, grows a terrible thorn thicket, many miles across. In the middle of this thicket is a spring. Ah, your honours, such a beautiful spring! Nowhere in the world is there one like it—this is the spring of the water of youth. One sip removes twenty, thirty years from your age."

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"A fine story to tell us, that is!" shouted a derisive voice. "Why hasn't anyone ever heard of this water before?"

Shrugged a patient shoulder, Senor Pedro did. "Am I not telling you, senoras, senores? This water is very hard to procure. The Indians are hostile, the place is distant, the thicket is impenetrable and perilous, muy periculoso."

"If the water does that to you, why don't the Indians drink it and stay young for ever?"

"Quien sabe? Maybe they do. Who can tell what age a pygmy has reached? But what I am come to tell you, senoras, is that with me I have—" here he brought it from under his jacket and held it up with a flourish—"a bottle, the last bottle in Europe, of this renowned, miraculous, youth-giving liquid brought to you all the way from Brazil." There was a murmur of wonder from the crowd, and they gazed at the stone bottle, which was crowned with gold foil and might hold a quart.

"Why don't you drink it yourself?" shrilled Mrs. Griffith the Dispensary. "Poison I believe it is!"

"Ah, there's probable! Or why should he be offering it for sale when he's as worn and wizened himself as an old seed potato?"

"Maybe he prefers the money, fair play?" suggested Rhys the Red Dragon.

"Why should I wish to grow younger?" said Senor Pedro scornfully. "One life with its troubles is enough for me. I have all I need. Back in the Andes my good wife is waiting for me, beautiful as an angel. But the dearest longing of her heart is a new grand piano, for though we stood the legs of her Otway in four pans of kerosene, the termites ate it away until nothing remained but the keys."

"Did you ever hear of such a calamity?" mourned the sympathetic crowd.

"Her only wish is to play once more. And that is why, senoras, senores, at risk to my life I filled six bottles with the water of youth and came to Europe. Here you see the last of them. I am now going to auction it. Will any gracious lady or gentleman offer me five hundred pounds for it, this miraculous elixir, this water of youth?"

"Come on, now, Lily Griffith! Tickled to death your old man would be, to see you a lovely young twenty-one-year-old again!"

"As if I'd waste my money on such stuff," sniffed Mrs. Griffith. "Better things I have to do with it. Five hundred pounds indeed!" The crowd hesitated, broke, laughed, and chaffered. Senor Pedro kept the auction bubbling like a lukewarm kettle.

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There were other attractions in the square. Music thundered between the houses, there were goldfish to be won by a skilful fling of a dart, hot dogs to be eaten, vases and teasets at the rifle gallery, candy floss for the children; and all the time the rain pelted down. But the great shafts of light pushing upwards from the sideshows turned the rain to a canopy of sparkle.

Owen Richards the poet came down from his castle to the fair with Ariel his guest, a famous actress from the boards of London, and the love of his long life.

"I must have my fortune told," said she, making a beeline for Myfanwy's van with its sugar-pink stripes and the portrait of Myfanwy over the door which had so bewitched Ianto Evans two years before that he had gone into the van and never been seen again.

"*You* at least should have no worries about your fortune, Ariel," said Owen, but she shuddered as she glanced into a little shell-encrusted looking-glass that he had won at the rifle gallery and caught a glimpse of her lovely, ageing face. He followed her into the sugar-striped van.

Myfanwy was playing waterfalls with a pack of cards which she could pour from one hand to another like water from a cup to a can.

"Tell my fortune," commanded Ariel, and she put out her hand.

"Steady you must hold it, then," Myfanwy bade her, and she built a card-house on Ariel's palm, ten, jack, queen, king, and the ace for a roof; Ariel neither budged nor spoke.

"Second storey is it," Myfanwy said at that, and she built another on top of the first. Ariel held her hand steady as a table—a fine, thin hand, and the wrist so transparent you could see the veins in it. "Fancy now," Myfanwy said, and she laid a third storey on top of the second. "Very unusual that is."

But still the tower stood without falling on Ariel's palm, and Myfanwy pursed her lips and added the final storey, four black spades and the ace on top of it all.

"Now blow," she said, and Ariel blew, scattering the cards like a shower of apple-blossom across the tent. Myfanwy picked them up. A look of amazement came over her face.

"O dammo," says she, "crazy old fortune you've got here. Neither head nor tail can I make of it! Try again, you must."

"No, I'll *not* try again," says Ariel, laughing. "I'm *not* wishful to tempt Providence too far. We'll leave it at that." And she crossed Myfanwy's hand with a flourish of half-crowns.

"Can't you say if she'll marry?" asked Owen Richards the poet, anxious as a hen with one duckling.

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" Far as I can make out she'll have more husbands than Henry the Eighth," Myfanwy says. " A heron must have flown over the van and bewitched the cards. Good luck to you, lady, and remember Myfanwy in your will."

Ariel laughed. " Maybe I'll never make a will," she said.

Out they went into the rain again.

•

Soon as they were gone, Ianto Evans, he that had left his good wife for Myfanwy's sake two years before, crept out from under the bed.

" Ten o'clock," he said. " Blodwen will have been out to Jones the Cod to buy her bit of fish and chips. Locked away snug, she'll be, watching the telly; I'll just nip along home and dig up the clematis by the back door. Planted that clematis myself, I did; no reason it shouldn't come with us on our wanderings. Lovely little flowers it has, like red butterflies."

" Careful now, Ianto bach," Myfanwy said. " Supposing she's out at the fair? Meet her you might, and then the fur would fly."

" Not Blodwen, not her. She never went to a fair since the day she was old enough to pop a penny into a moneybox." And off he strode into the silvery wet night, and sniffing up the alley to his back door like a hound on a fish trail—only he was on the track of Blodwen and her Friday four-pennorth, to make sure was she safely locked up with the hake and chips. Smell of fish there was, sure enough, but it had been left by Thomas the Electric, four houses farther on. Just put the clematis in his pocket, Ianto had, when Blodwen came along with her supper and let out a screech at sight of him.

" Oh, there's my skulking husband that ran off and left me for a cardsharping Jezebel! Wait till I get my hands on you, Ianto my man! "

Ran he did, like a hare, and she after him, down the alley, through the coconut shies, into the square, past the learned pig, between the tenpins, up the skiffle alley, and three times round the hot cat stand. Towards Myfanwy's van he fled, meaning perhaps to hide behind her skirts, and then, gaining a bit of sense before it was too late, turned aside into Jones the Rope Trick's enclosure. " Save me, Jones man, save me! " he bawled.

The crowd cheered and laughed, for most of them had felt the weight of Blodwen's tongue at one time or another, and they were on the side of the underdog. Quick as a wink Jones picked up his clarinet and tootled out *Men of Harlech*. The coiled rope stood up and begged like a hamadryad; no monkey ever climbed quicker than Ianto shinned up it hand over hand.

When Blodwen arrived, ten quick seconds later by Morgan the

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Turf's stopwatch, he was out of sight into the black wet sky above.

" Gone he has, ma'am," says Jones, very sober. " Angels are singing *Cwm Rhondda* round him this minute, likely as not."

Blodwen gave Jones one look, one, but enough to loosen every stopping in his teeth, and then she turned on her heel and started for home; she knew when she was beaten. But on her way, having lost her hake and chips in the chase, she stopped at the stand for a hamburger and tomato sauce.

Meanwhile Senor Pedro had sold his Water of Youth to Ariel the actress for two hundred and seventy pounds, nine shillings and ninepence. " Only to such a lovely lady as you would I part with my precious water for so mean a sum," he mourned, handing over the gold-wrapped bottle.

" There's crazy for you! " said Mrs. Griffith. " Fancy spending all that good money on an old bottle with like as not nothing but tap water inside it."

" Try a drop! " shouted the crowd.

" Throw it away! " begged Owen Richards the poet. " Marry me, Ariel! Forget about the moribund old theatre, is it? Stay here! Queen of the whole town you'd be."

But Ariel looked about at the crowd, and in her voice that could sing or whisper its way up to the tiptop seat in the gallery she called, " Who can lend me a corkscrew? "

Morgan the Turf had his whipped out a photo finish ahead of Rhys the Red Dragon, took the bottle, and opened it with a bow.

Set her lips to it, then, Ariel did, and a quick swallow with her. Then she stopped, half laughing, half scared, crying, " Dare I go on? "

" Throw it away, Ariel love," Owen Richards begged.

But the crowd shouted, " Drink up, ma'am! "

Now a law of physics there is, see, very unbreakable, which says, " All that goes up must come down." And just at that moment what should come down but Ianto Evans like an old blockbuster plump into the middle of things. Knocked the bottle clean out of Ariel's hand he did—lucky she'd put the cork back—and himself pretty near silly.

Soon on his feet again he was though, for when Blodwen, teeth halfway through her hamburger, loitering to enjoy a free spectacle for once in her cheeseparing life, laid eyes on him, she was after him again like an old pike after a springtime salmon, and off into the dark alleys he fled, clasping the bottle in his frantic hand. Once he tripped and fell and dropped it; Blodwen swooped on him, but it was the bottle she grabbed in her haste, not Ianto.

" Oh, but I'll have you yet," shouted the termagant, and while Morgan the Turf was going round laying two to one on Blodwen,

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the pair of them kept it up round the town, ding-dong, now here, now there.

No lie, now, for many a long year after, if a man wanted to describe something faster than mere speed he'd say, "Like Blodwen Evans the night she was after her husband Ianto."

Meanwhile, what of Ariel? you will be asking, and indeed to goodness there was wonder enough in the way the years were dropping off her like layers of gauze. No more than nineteen she looked now, as she stood scared and smiling, and a long ah! at her beauty trembled through the crowd. Only Owen Richards in grief turned his head away; he knew she was lost to him for ever now.

"Oh!" she cried, "I'm afraid, I'm afraid of what is happening to me! Must it all begin again, the doubts and terrors of youth? Comfort me, Owen dear, tell me I haven't changed. Owen, comfort me!"

But he in silence held up to her the little shell-bordered looking-glass. When she had looked once it seemed as if the weight of her beauty would crush her like a snowfall in May. Stepped away, she did, hanging her head, and the crowd parted in a hush as she walked to her car.

"Back to London, is it?" said Owen, standing with his hand on the bonnet.

"Back to London, indeed," said she, sighing.

"Then good-bye, my love."

Her tears splashed on the steering-wheel like raindrops as she drove away to face her new legend of life and the harshness of being young. Owen, with a heart of lead, turned back, but with no spirit in him for the fair.

"Let's hope we've seen the last of that bottle; unsettling it is," Rhys the Red Dragon commented.

And Mrs. Griffith said, "Indeed to goodness, yes!"

But Blodwen, now: breathless, with tomato sauce sticking in her gullet like china clay, she had stopped the chase of Ianto a moment to take a swig at the bottle, hoping maybe—knowing her Ianto—that it would be whisky. But no more than a couple of good gollops had she taken ("Ach y fi, it's only water, then!") when she laid eyes on Ianto stealing back to Myfanwy's van behind the big roundabout.

Quick as a weasel after him, Blodwen. Over the roundabout she went, threading her way between horses and swans. "Give us a break, Alun, man!" shouts Ianto. "Start her up, then!" and Alun threw in his gears with a thrashing like an old whale in convulsions. Slow at first, then faster, spinning in a giddy gold spiral, switchbacking up and down, round went the swans

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and dragons, a whole glittering stableland of bucking broncos.

Well! stuck fast Blodwen was, and had to make the best of it, clinging tight to a swan's neck. But the bottle, spun out of her hand by another natural wonder known as centrifugal force, flew off like a bullet over the heads of the crowd, and nobody's eye followed it into the dark.

Gone, and a good riddance too, Owen Richards thought.

Back to his castle then, poor Mr. Richards, to live out his final years with owls and ink, in an everlasting third act of spiderwebs. Or so he thought.

Sitting over a bottle of claret he was, late enough for tomorrow's moon, when half the town came tapping at his door, timid but trustful, for to whom but a poet can you turn when life throws up such a problem as the roundabout had tossed them?

"See here, Mr. Richards bach, an orphan we have on our hands," says Morgan the Turf, very solemn, and the crowd shoves forward a small girl, blackhaired, sapling-thin, fierce as a fury.

"You're the wisest man in this town, Mr. Richards dear," the neighbours said. "Fitting it is you should have charge of this child of misfortune. Too young she is to live in her own house alone, see; and her husband run off with the fortune-teller."

"Husband?" said Owen Richards, and then he looked closer and recognised Blodwen Evans of forty years ago—Blodwen Pugh as she was then.

Tears of rage there were still on her cheeks, but forgetfulness had followed her plunge back into childhood. Her anger had left her and she gazed at him with no more than wonder for an old poet and his cobwebbed castle.

"Live with me, is it, my dear?" said Owen.

And she in awe answered, "Yes, sir," and bobbed a curtsy. Nodding approval, the town fathers withdrew to The Red Dragon.

Where, all this time, you will be asking, where is Senor Pedro, the author of these troubles?

Not a man to outstay his welcome, the little pedlar, and he was tramping out of town down the rainswept highroad with his two hundred and seventy pounds when a speeding pink van overtook him.

"Lift to Cardiff?" called a head from the window—Ianto's.

"I thank you; yes."

"Wet old night it is for walking," Ianto said, as the little man unslung his pack and shook the mud out of his turn-ups.

"Indeed yes."

"No more of those bottles, have you?" Ianto asked, handing

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over a mug of tea and a hospitable wedge of cake, as Myfanwy drove them on their swift way.

Senor Pedro shook his head.

"Just as well then," Ianto said. "More trouble in that bottle than in a whole keg of whisky, if you will be asking my opinion."

"You do not think that to grow younger is a blessing?"

"Not for Myfanwy and me." And Ianto looked fondly at the back of Myfanwy's neck as she bent over the wheel. "All we wish is that we grow old together and die on the same day."

"Ah," Senor Pedro said with sympathy, and he thought of his own dear wife on the slopes of the Andes.

What became of the bottle? you will be wondering, and the answer to that is easy: it fell into the town reservoir, standing on its one leg farther up the mountainside.

Put up the water-rates like a shot, the council would have, had they guessed, but nobody did; though, as the years went by, and no one in the place grew a day older, people did begin to wonder why. But in a town the folk get used to one another's faces, and nobody thought about it very deeply as they went about their business. Visitors might have wondered at it indeed; become a famous tourist centre, the place might have, but for the seeds in Pedro's turn-ups.

Scattered some of those famous thorn seeds he had—whether by mistake or on purpose, who can say?—and almost overnight a dense thicket of brambles sprang up that soon had the town surrounded. Nobody noticed; too wrapped up in their own concerns they were, with council meetings and oratorios, weddings, and Gorsedds, all presided over by Owen the poet and his happy adopted daughter Blodwen; Wales will hear of her, too, one day, indeed, if copies of her poems ever find their way past the thorn thicket.

So there you have them: Ariel still a lovely legend on the boards of London town; Ianto and his Myfanwy, old and wrinkled and gay as two crickets travelling the country in their fortune-telling van, with the flowers of the clematis—its roots safely bedded in a pickle-pot—fluttering like red butterflies over the roof; Senor Pedro long since back with his piano on the slopes of the Andes; the townspeople living their carefree unchanging lives till the Day of Judgment.

And what have any of them done to deserve it?

Not a thing.

No moral to this story, you will be saying, and I am afraid it is true.

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An ARGOSY "first"—an eerie short-short from New Zealand

GIRLIE

BY I. MACDONALD WOOD

IF I'd been quiet and listening that night at Spitewinter I'd have known something was amiss. Old places and old things talk to you then. But I wasn't quiet. I was excited, what with the fancy dress party and wearing Great Aunt M'raldy's wedding dress an' all. Excited! I was that sparking I could've lit a bonfire without matches. So I could.

When old Phoebe saw me in that dress she clapped a hand over her mouth and her eyes looked kinda scarey. "Mercy me," she whispered, "the spitt'n' image."

She turned me round, feather-fingered-like, as if touching me wasn't to her liking. Then she whipped my hair down, and like lightning flicked it round my face in black ringlets. Done that before she had—often—you could tell. Though not to me she hadn't.

"Stay there. Don't move," she whispered, and looked at me funny over her shoulder, thinking I'd melt right there before her eyes. She brought a great cameo brooch from a drawer and pinned it to the dress. At the back of it, under a little glass lid, was a glossy black curl nestling together with a twist of reddish hair.

"Whose are they?" I whispered. Dear knows why we were whispering, but you couldn't talk loud—not looking at those little curls. Like being in chapel it was.

Tears now where the scarey look had been. "Mr. Rory's and Miss Esmeralda's," she whispered.

She stood back and her hand was at her lips again, the scarey look back of the tears. "Dear knows what Miss Girlie will say—but see you she must."

Quiet came for a moment while I touched the brooch, and it was as if Great Aunt M'raldy herself and her sister Kath'rine—my great-grandmother—drifted into the room. Like the scent on an old shawl it was. I should've waited—quiet—but I pushed

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them away, ran past Phoebe to the mirror, turned and preened.

Right out of that old photograph of the three sisters I'd stepped. M'raldy in the middle, all flash and fire, black ringlets a-dance and toes ready to trip right off the picture; Kath'rine, cool and haughty, on one side; and on the other, Girlie, soft and gentle as a young dove. The Spitewinter Beauties! The Fremantle Girls!

And here's Phoebe whispering about Miss M'raldy's Rory vanishing right on the eve of the wedding, and Miss M'raldy herself following him. And nothing heard of her since except for the note she pinned to her wedding dress with the cameo brooch:

I'll never come back till I find him.

And how Miss Girlie had nearly died with shock and had never really got over it, but had taken to her room and never left it from that day to this—and her now ninety-two years old.

It was like a book—leastways, Great Aunt M'raldy's part and Girlie's. Not Kath'rine's, though. She got married as you could tell she meant to in the picture, and nothing happened to her bar having three husbands and nearly two hundred great-grandchildren—and being presented to the Queen and what-all.

But M'raldy! All for the sake of love she was never heard of again—nothing but a wedding dress and a love-knot of hair. And Girlie—so lovely and so delicate that she couldn't face life after such a shock and so went to live for seventy-two years in the big panelled drawing-room, and wore a dove-grey and lavender dress and a lace doily on her hair.

Right proud of Girlie we were—and who wouldn't be?—and we took our friends to see her where she sat like a little silvery queen in the heavy carved chair at the side of the fireplace. Her eyes were faraway but still blue and soft—like pansies dipped in milk. Everything else about her was faraway too, and when she spoke you were minded of cowbells on the faraway hills—there and not there—and you nodded and smiled so's she'd know you understood.

But she was spry enough for all her soft little ways, and sometimes she'd run to the bell-rope by the fireplace and pull so's you'd think she'd have the roof down. When Phoebe came running, she'd order her carriage or some such nonsense and then sit in her chair and forget all about it. So she would.

All eager I was to show myself to Girlie, for at nineteen you're after thinking about your looks overmuch. So I left Phoebe and ran to the drawing-room and tapped on the door and went in.

Girlie was in her chair as usual. I walked to the middle of the room and stood before her, smiling. Girlie looked at me and something there was came into her eyes.

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"M'raldy!" she said, clear as clear, "you're beautiful, M'raldy."

She left her chair and came towards me. "Yes, you're beautiful, M'raldy—but you shall not have him."

Dear knows why I said what I did, but the words were out before I knew. "Where is he?"

Girlie smiled. "I'll show you," she said.

I followed her to the fireplace.

"I'm hiding him for you," whispered Girlie. "See."

She pressed something on the wall and the panelling behind her chair slid sideways.

Sick I felt as I looked into the darkness. Down, down it went, the blackness . . . Then it was that I felt her tiny hand on my back. But ninety-two isn't nineteen and she was no match for M'raldy this time. I just turned and lifted her and put her gently back in her chair . . .

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Butch the Burglar

"I say the seashore. We burgled in the mountains last summer."

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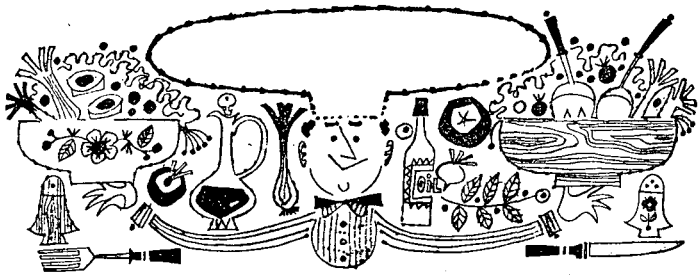

SALAD DAYS

Salad, and eggs, and lighter fare,
Tune the Italian spark's guitar;
And, if I take Dan Congreve right,
Pudding and beef make Britons fight.

MATTHEW PRIOR, *Alma*

At counters where I eat my lunch
In dim arcades of industry,
I cock my elbows up and munch
Whatever food occurs to me.
By many mirrors multiplied,
My silly face is not exalted;
And when I leave I have inside
An egg-and-lettuce and a malted.
And just to hear the pretty peal
Of merry maids at their pimento
Is more to me than any meal
Or banquet that I ever went to.

E. B. WHITE, *Marble-Top*

A Loaf of Bread, a Dinner of Herbs . . .

Also in the cast were Catherine Lacey, Leo Genn, Harold Clayton, and a loaf of bread which for reasons best known to itself, rolled about the stage a great deal during the Monday matinée and caused vast merriment both sides of the footlights. By Monday the news had spread round the theatrical profession like a forest fire and the theatre was crammed from top to bottom with earnest students of contemporary drama. Miss Graham had brought in a lot of her friends to play captive lady Britons, and I had to bind them up a good deal, which was very difficult as they struggled like maniacs, not having attended many rehearsals. I remember many notable lines in the play, and it is

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difficult to forget a character called Eine, the Herb-Woman, played with élan by Miss Inez Bensusan, who at the dress-rehearsal had forgotten a fairly essential " prop " and announced on the stage, " I am Eine, the Herb-Woman." There was then a long pause before she hissed into the wings, " I've forgotten the herbs " which were thrown on by the distraught stage-manager, and the set suddenly resembled Culpeper House.

PETER BULL, *I Know the Face, But . . .*

On the Rocks

Six cold pennies he gave me
Not a farthing more or less
And all the fare I could afford
Was parsnip gin and watercress.
I did not need a knife and fork
Or a bib up to my chin
To dine on a dish of watercress
And a jug of parsnip gin.

DYLAN THOMAS, *Under Milk Wood*

Top People's Dressing

Little Billee, taking with him three francs (or even four), would dive into back streets and buy a yard or so of crusty new bread, well burned on the flat side, a fillet of beef, a litre of wine, potatoes and onions, butter, a little cylindrical cheese called " bondon de Neufchâtel," tender curly lettuce, with chervil, parsley, spring onions, and other fine herbs, and a pod of garlic, which would be rubbed on a crust of bread to flavour things with.

Taffy would lay the cloth English-wise, and also make the salad, for which, like everybody else I ever met, he had a special receipt of his own (putting in the oil first and the vinegar after); and indeed his salads were quite as good as everybody else's . . .

And they would dine far better than at le Père Trin's, far better than at the English Restaurant in the Rue de la Madeleine —better than anywhere else on earth!

GEORGE DU MAURIER, *Trilby*

According to the Spanish proverb, four persons are wanted to make a good salad: a spendthrift for oil, a miser for vinegar, a counsellor for salt, and a madman to stir all up.

ABRAHAM HAYWARD, *The Art of Dining*

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Salad of the Bad Café!

This is a very sad ballad,
Because it's about the way too many people make a salad.
Generally they start with bananas,
And they might just as well use Gila monsters or iguanas.
Pineapples are another popular ingredient,
Although there is one school that holds preserved pears or peaches more expedient,
And you occasionally meet your fate
In the form of a prune or a date . . .
And about the only thing that in this kind of salad is never seen
Is any kind of green,
And oil and vinegar and salt and pepper are at a minimum,
But there is a maximum of sugar and syrup and ginger and nutmeg and cinnamum,
And my thoughts about this kind of salad are just as unutterable
As parsnips are unbutterable,
And indeed I am surprised that the perpetrators haven't got around to putting buttered parsnips in these salmagundis,
And the salad course nowadays seems to be a month of sundaes.

OGDEN NASH, *My Dear, How Ever Did You Think Up This Delicious Salad?*

Chili con Brio

I don't know why it is, but nearly all singers think they are great salad mixers. They are almost as jealous about their special "dressing" as about their box-office drawing capacity. Caruso used to have his salad oil especially bottled for him and I have seen him in white apron and chef's cap mixing a *mayonnaise* as if his livelihood depended upon its success.

LUIA FORBES, *Dinner is Served*

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BOY ON THE BEACH

She was barefoot, in shorts and candy-striped jersey —mopheaded from salt water

BY ARTHUR MAYSE

THE girl stayed around the point for the time it took Zeb Hunter to trickle a fistful of sand through his fingers. Then she came in sight again, still wandering, still searching.

Zeb scooped more sand and let the grains commence their measured trickle, his mind languidly occupied with a problem of timing. His sand should be half gone when she drew level with the pocket between drift logs where he sprawled in August sunshine with Holtz and Malloy. By the time she reached the cove's south point, his hand ought to be empty.

She wrecked his calculations by turning in towards them, a slim kid maybe sixteen years old, barefoot, in shorts and candy-striped jersey, mopheaded from salt water and ocean breeze.

They watched her approach, the practised car thief and his two stooges. Zeb waited for Malloy to crack off, but the big guy lay quiet with eyes half closed, beer bottle balanced on his chest.

"I beg your pardon." She spoke to Zeb, the words falling precisely, as if this were a speech she had rehearsed. "Did you happen to find a small gold locket in the sand?"

Zeb shook his head. When they dealt with squares, Malloy carried the ball. He had established that rule early, and enforced it by hurtful methods of his own.

"The chain must have broken. I thought perhaps . . ." She seemed to have run out of words.

Malloy removed the bottle from his chest. He sat up and took over smoothly.

"Why, that's too bad. How about if we help you find this locket?"

Most girls smiled or coloured or both when he stared at them like that. This one ignored Malloy's look and Holtzy's wide, unsubtle grin. She had nice eyes: hazel, Zeb guessed you'd call that shade between brown and gold. They went well with brown hair and biscuit tan.

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"Thanks." Her glance touched Zeb coolly and briefly. "Don't bother."

They watched her rove on along the empty beach, head bent, searching. Zeb paced her with a renewed trickle of sand. He knew, resentfully but with bleak clarity, what little Miss Mophead had seen and the conclusions she'd drawn. Three tough monkeys. Hoods. City strays who didn't belong on a rich folks' beach. The kind a nice girl with sense would keep clear of.

Malloy, shoulders against a log, said lazily to Holtz, "Give."

"Aw, hey—it was me found it!"

The protest ended in a squeal as Malloy snaked a hand to his skinny wrist. Holtz yowled and threshed. His free hand scrabbled for his pocket. Malloy looped the thin gold chain around a finger.

Holtz nursed a wrist on which pressure marks were darkening from white to blue. He said with as much resentment as he dared, "That's solid gold, that is. I could have got four or five bucks for that!"

"Two," Malloy said. "Anyhow, it has a sentimental value. Squares run heavy to sentiment, Holtzy."

He clicked the locket open. The picture inside the little gold heart was of a darkhaired woman, head and shoulders, pretty in a grown-up way. In twenty years, Zeb reflected, the girl would look a lot like her.

Holtz, who never could keep anything in his head longer than a minute, crowded in to peer, his mad fit of temper forgotten. "Huh! I figured it'd be her boyfriend's picture in there."

"Ought to be," Malloy said. "A chick like that. But maybe her education has been neglected."

He twirled the locket so that the chain circled his finger, smiling, staring at Zeb. "Wouldn't you say so, Zeb boy? Wouldn't you agree?"

Zeb said nothing.

The girl, standing before them with sea and sky soft-blended for background, had put him in mind of the colt on Hurter's farm where they had spent the morning harvesting spuds. She had that same combination of awkwardness and young grace. He let the last of the sand slide through his fingers; but the girl had crossed him again, turned into one or other of the paths that angled down through undergrowth from the fan of big properties fronting on Ocean Crescent.

Sudden as a trap springing, Malloy's fist clenched in his hair. Flipped over, a knee between his shoulders, and his head wrenched back, he heard the lazy voice above him.

"When we're spoken to, Zebulon, we answer. We answer

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fast and polite. Since maybe you're having trouble with your ears, I'll repeat the question."

The hand yanked; agony seared Zeb's scalp. "Needs educating, don't she, boy?"

He gasped out a "Yes." Malloy loosed him, and Zeb bounced to his knees, eyes watering and brain in a perilous teeter between caution and rage. If I'd another couple of stone, he thought. If I was tough like him, if I could fight like him . . .

Caution won. With Malloy, he was chicken; he knew it, and hated himself for the knowledge. Malloy knew, too. He had already turned away and was lounging against his log, finishing the beer he had lifted from the case in old man Hurter's shed.

Holtz said, with a jerk of his shaggy blond head towards the south point, "Hey! Lookit what comes."

Nothing to get excited about. Not the girl returning, but a dog and a man emerging from driftwood piled on the foreshore to the flat. The dog, leashed, was a German shepherd, the kind Ocean Crescent people would keep to guard their properties. It paced close to its master and slightly ahead. The man wore swimming trunks, a sports shirt open down the front, and carried a towel looped around his neck.

Zeb scowled at the approaching figure. Rich. Fatcat. Walking the beach as if he owned it. Probably come to run them off, with his watchdog to back him up. His resentment seemed to drive out like a bullet. The man tumbled headlong. Holtz sounded off with his cawing laugh. He rolled and hugged himself, the loose hair flopping over his eyes. Malloy drank the last of his beer and slung the bottle out to shatter on a pebble bar that flawed the run of sand.

The man knelt with the dog nuzzling his face, snuffing him anxiously. He roughed the fur over its shoulders, then began to scoop with both hands, making sand fly. Presently he gripped and hauled, straightening with what appeared to be a metal barrel hoop. He pivoted and lobbed the hoop; a long throw, but it carried easily, sailing high over the driftlogs to drop in a thicket.

"Jeez!" Holtz gaped with bony face screwed up. "Gramp's got an arm, huh, Malloy? He oughta watch where he puts his feet, though."

"He should carry a white cane," Zeb said. "That's a guide dog, dopey. He's blind."

"Smart boy," Malloy observed. "Difference between you and Zebulon, Holtzy, is that Zeb has a brain. You might even say at times he's too bright."

Dog and man continued their leisurely progress. Without

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command, the sheepdog halted five feet from them. Even at this range, the man's age was hard to guess: but younger, Zeb decided, than his close-clipped grey hair indicated. His face was seamed, with an odd stiffness about it, as if wax had been pumped to harden under his skin. He unlooped the towel and peeled off the sports shirt. Nice build; you could see how he managed a throw like that.

"How's the water?"

None of them, not even Holtz, had made a sound, but he knew they were here. If it weren't for the harnessed guide dog with its stiff, U-shaped lead, you would never guess he was blind.

Knows where he is, Zeb thought, and where he's going.

Holtzy, the clown, glanced to Malloy for his cue. "Wet, mister. Awful wet."

"It's cold," Zeb said.

"Warmer in winter," the man said. "Or feels so. I suppose because the spread between air and water temperature is less."

He strode down towards the cove with his dog.

"Another smart one," Malloy said. The pebble bar with its smashed beer bottle lay directly across their course. "But is he as smart as he thinks, I wonder?" His face wore the fixed, small smile that came when someone was about to get hurt. He murmured, "We shall see."

Zeb felt the shout of warning rise in his throat. But the grin was for him now.

"Don't louse it, Zeb boy," Malloy said. "I wouldn't like that." Then as the sheepdog skirted the broken glass, "Correction. The pooch is the smart one."

As if following an accustomed drill, the dog wheeled at the cove edge. It trotted back to settle by the blind man's towel and shirt. The brass plate on its collar carried a name, *Rankin*, and a telephone number. It watched the greyhaired man intently as he waded out and dived.

"Yi!" Holtz peered. "Guy's got seal blood!"

"A grandstander," Malloy said. He was a fair swimmer himself, but not in the blind man's class. The realisation brought Zeb a dour satisfaction. He timed the swimmer—finding his count hard to credit—till Rankin turned in a tight swirl at the edge of the kelp bed that flanked the south point and cut back along his own wake.

A low-pitched rumble, not quite a snarl, fetched Zeb's head round. Malloy, hand arrested in a reach to the sports shirt, stared at the dog, which eyed him calmly. Malloy, he deduced, had been about to raid the cigarette packet in the shirt pocket.

"Man's faithful friend," Malloy said.

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The rumble sounded again, an ominous warning, and he drew his hand back. "Rankin . . . Now who ever heard of a mutt called Rankin? Putting one and one together, him making big out there is Mr. Rankin. Adding another one, the highnose chick is Miss Rankin."

He gave Zeb the smile which was not a smile; he had taken the locket from his jeans and swung it daintily. "That there is her daddy. Her name is Helen Rankin. Inside this, it says so."

Zeb didn't answer. He risked another mauling, but he was sick of Malloy. Had, he realised, been growing sicker of the big guy for weeks.

More and more, he wished Malloy had never drifted into the hangout that night in July—older than the high school bunch, tough in a way none of those kids were—not exactly throwing his weight around but establishing an island which, a couple of nights later, he had permitted Holtz and Zeb to share. Even with Malloy's car deal about set and real money in prospect, he was sick to the teeth of Malloy.

He levered himself up from his nest between logs. "Come on," he said gruffly. "This place is dead, it creeps me. Let's go."

That night, hot and sleepless in his basement room, he lay with arms under his head, trying to keep his thoughts on the coupé he had sunk most of his July work-money into, wondering whether his split from Malloy's deal would let him chop and lead the heap and work the engine over. Enough money, perhaps, to turn it into a real rod, a bomb with a four-barrel carb . . .

But his mind kept drifting back to the blind man who walked so sure in his world of darkness. To Rankin and his daughter, the mophaired kid in the striped jersey. Her and her locket.

If it had been him found it, he would have teased her a little, since that was expected with girls. But not for long, and in the end he would have dropped the locket with a flourish in her hand. Maybe not even any kidding. Just given her the little gold heart and watched her face light up.

He couldn't settle whether she was pretty or not. He knew only that she went with the scent of newcut grass drifting in at the window, and the sight of a colt longlegged in a pasture. With clean sea-beach and westerly breeze, white gulls wheeling over.

Zeb went to sleep thinking about her, but he dreamt of Malloy, himself down and the big guy putting the boots to him. It was a nightmare from which he was glad to wake, sweating . . .

Next day yawned empty.

By the terms of Malloy's probation, he was supposed to keep employed, but the potato harvesting job had blown when old

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Hurter caught Malloy and Holtz sneaking stones into the sacks.

Zeb trimmed lawn edges for his dad, got scolded as usual for running a raggedy line and, without bothering about lunch, clattered off in the heap. Burning up petrol, driving aimlessly, he played with the notion of backing out of the car deal. But even while he let that fancy develop, a glum inner voice told him he wouldn't do it. Malloy would look at him with the thin smile and he'd chicken, play along.

He found himself clear of town, through the clutter of new subdivisions that were gobbling the orchard land, and rolling west on Ocean Crescent. The sea lured him, glimpsed sparkling blue between trees of the big old properties on his left. He had, Zeb realised now, been heading this way as if drawn by a magnet.

Hoping the law wouldn't tow it off as junk, he left the heap on the roadstrip in what shade he could find, then slipped down through the nearest property to the shore.

The beach was as they had come to it yesterday. Empty: clean and deserted. Zeb searched for a girl in shorts and jersey, but saw no life other than the gulls that planed gracefully above the blue-green shallows or foraged on the tide flat.

He mooched south along the curve of the cove, his sandals scooping sand. The afternoon stretched before him, dull as his morning had been. Down where they'd loafed yesterday, the twinkle of smashed glass caught his gaze. He plodded out to the spot and had collected most of the broken beer bottle when pebbles crunched behind him.

She stood watching him as she had the day before; wary, but not scared. She wore a blue swimsuit, and in one hand she swung a sieve of the kind gardeners use, a round of cheesebox with a wire-mesh base. The hazel eyes took in his double handful of glass shards, and it seemed to Zeb the cool wariness eased.

"Aren't your friends with you today?"

He shook his head; he didn't much mind her calling Holtzy his friend but, suddenly and very definitely, he disliked hearing Malloy spoken of so. Sure—he did what Malloy said, kicked around with him. But they weren't friends.

"Just me." He picked up another chunk of bottle. "I thought maybe your dad or you or some little kid might get cut on this stuff."

"You've missed one," she said. "The worst one." She bent and recovered a piece of bottle base from which glass jutted in a wicked spike. I don't suppose you found my locket?"

Zeb wanted to tell her why neither she nor he would find the gold heart but there, too, he was chicken. "Sorry." He had swimming trunks on under his jeans. "You going in?"

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"No. I'd better start looking." Over a brown shoulder, turning away, she said, "You can help me if you like."

If he told her she'd flip or, what would be even worse, try to coax him into getting her stupid locket back from Malloy, a proposition hopeless as asking him to reach her a star.

"There's an awful lot of sand. You can't sift it all."

"It must be somewhere," she answered him stubbornly. "When I lost it I was running along the beach close to the logs. We'll start at the north point."

A dreary task, the more so for being pointless. Only good thing about it, Zeb thought gloomily, was that it gave him her company. They sifted dried orange peel and cigarette butts, crumpled foil and a buffalo nickel, debris of a summer almost done. It was amazing what you turned up, even on a little-used beach like this. The sun had dropped lower and they had covered a mere twenty feet or so of their strip when the girl called a halt.

"Swim now?" Zeb asked her.

"I wish I could, Zeb." They had exchanged names, although hers he already knew; guilty knowledge that continued to depress him. "But I have to keep my hair dry. I'm going out tonight."

"A date, huh?" She gave him her quick nod.

"Yacht club dance." Her smile turned her very pretty. "I'm excited; this is the first year I've been old enough."

Well, so she had a boyfriend after all, so Malloy was wrong. And no skin off his nose, he assured himself. Girls he could take or leave alone.

"Are you mad about something, Zeb?"

"Me? Oh no." He dusted sand off his palms. College guy, probably. Smooth operator with a white jacket and one of those lowslung imported sports cars he'd seen and envied, gleaming under the Ocean Crescent carports. "Have a nice time," he said to Helen Rankin, and dug out for the cove. An overlooked glass fragment stung his foot, but he did not stop.

He was less than halfway across the cove mouth, and tiring, when a hand stroked past him and a grey head and leather-dark shoulder slid into his bleared vision.

"This," said the blind man, "we do by numbers. Try it with me."

He loafed level, demonstrating, instructing. Presently Zeb began to get the rhythm, the timed beat and flutter. Weariness forgotten, he found that his arms were slicing in cleanly, the outer bulbs of the kelp bed close.

Rankin swirled and passed him. "Try it back?" he asked.

And Zeb grinned into the sightless face and answered, "Sure!"

He made it clear to the other point. He was breathless and

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his arms dragged like lead, but he made it. He had never swum that distance before, or half of it, and the pride of accomplishment was solid and good. He doubted if Malloy had ever swum that far, either.

They sprawled in the sand, the sheepdog crouched close, sun drying them. Helen had returned to her sifting. After a while she came back to where they lay, but not to linger.

"Time I went up, Dad." She gave Zeb a smile and a casual "Bye now;" and chin on wrists, brooding, he watched slim legs and straight back and brown head out of sight.

"What happened to you, Mr. Rankin?" His mind had been on Helen; the question seemed to slip out of its own accord. And it could be something a blind man wouldn't care to talk about.

"Car crash." If Rankin resented the question, his voice and his seamed face failed to show it. "We were run into a ditch at night."

His daughter showed no scars. Zeb guessed the other in the "we" would be the dark, sweetfaced woman in the locket. But that question he couldn't ask.

Rankin answered it. "My wife was killed instantly. The doctors patched me up."

Hoods, maybe. Hoods driving the way Malloy liked to wheel. Clowning like Holtz. The guy in the white dinner jacket, he'd better not be that kind of driver. If it was me, Zeb thought, I wouldn't want to be stuck together again. I'd sooner be dead.

Rankin reached for cigarettes. He had a neat way of lighting up, the match nipped between his fingertips. That was the thing you noticed and kept on noticing—his sureness.

"For a year, Zeb," he said quietly, "a very bad year, I stuck in a kind of no man's land, a middle ground. I couldn't die and I had no wish to live. But the middle ground is an illusion, it doesn't truly exist. A man drifts back or he goes forward."

The smile gathered the seams of his mended face. "Finally I chose to go forward. Slow work. But I have Helen, and good friends to ease the way."

Me, Zeb thought, I wouldn't do so well. Being chicken, I'd drift back for sure. That's what he was doing now, dropping back. Before he met Malloy he hadn't been anything much: but not, at least, the thief which Malloy would turn him into some night soon.

"I'd been a research physicist," Rankin said, facing seaward with his look of vision that made it so hard to believe him blind. "Next month I start on a new job, assistant professor of physics at MacBride. I like teaching, I'm looking forward to that."

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There was another question, harder to ask. Zeb fought it down but it filled his heart and his mind, tearing its way through his layered unhappinesses.

"Mr. Rankin, what chance is there for a guy like me."

The blind man stayed silent so long that Zeb wondered if there'd be a reply. Not that any answer would help. Then, when Rankin did speak, it was no reply but a question of his own.

"Chance, Zeb? Chance for what? To make a million? Win the Grand Prix in a red Ferrari? Marry the prettiest girl in the world?"

They were dreams that had lured him. But only as dreams, awake or asleep. Yesterday he would have settled for very much less—just the money to turn his heap into a shiny rod with white-walled tyres and a souped-up engine. But yesterday seemed far back now; and what he had wanted then was no longer enough.

"To know where I'm going," he said. "The way you do."

The blind man rose. He looked tall and wide, outlined against the sea-sky blending. A big man.

"You're young," he said. "That's a powerful asset, son. Intelligent, or you'd be content with things as they are. Decent, I think, otherwise you wouldn't be concerned that children might cut their feet on glass you didn't break, or bother to help a girl look for a keepsake she treasured."

He reached for the dog's lead. "I can't advise you. I can only tell you from my own experience that a man goes forward or he drifts back. It's your choice, Zeb."

He moved off, unhurrying, guided by his dog.

Zeb scowled after him with misery unеased. He had guessed wrong about the grey man; Rankin was like all the rest of them underneath, one with father and mother, teachers and headmaster. They talked, and it mushed into nothing, sifted like sand through your fingers. Because you didn't have any choice. That was the laugh, the big lie. You went with the luck, you moved ahead or back as you were pushed. What Rankin had hit him with was only another sermon, sugarcoated by a swimming lesson and the flattery of a grown man's companionship.

Zeb tried hard to believe that. But it wouldn't work, he couldn't make it stick. His flaring rebellion shocked against the fact, the bitter and unassailable truth. Rankin was blind. Even with all he had, Rankin was alone, and in thirty years he would still be alone, and would die alone in the prison of his sightlessness. Even so, deliberately and in the face of that horror, he had forced himself to go forward. Forget the words! The man was the sermon and you had to heed it, you couldn't escape it . . .

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Zeb lay, head on arms, while afternoon merged with evening. The rustle of brush roused him from a half sleep. He scrambled up. Holtz was squirrelling towards him over the grey drift logs. Malloy stepped out of the trail mouth, big and unhurried.

Malloy was pleased with himself; it showed in the set of his heavy shoulders and the way he balanced atop a log with thumbs in belt. Maybe, Zeb thought—with the cringing already started inside him—maybe if Malloy felt good, he would withhold punishment. Malloy wouldn't have liked it, him hiding out on them, and when Malloy didn't like something, people got hurt.

"We're in, Zeb boy." Malloy spoke amiably. "All set. One car, my friends want. Just the one tonight. You and Holtzy turn it over to me on the back road. I deliver."

He stepped dainty as a cat from his log; the cat-purr was heavy in his voice. "We meet in town, split a bundle, and repeat tomorrow night. Sweet, no?"

"Sure." Zeb fetched words from a dry throat. "Except I didn't know we started so soon."

"Hell, boy, did you think I meant next year?"

Malloy was smiling. His left hand swung gently. Zeb caught the shimmer of metal, the locket twirling on its broken chain. He said, making talk, knowing he was licked and had been from the instant Malloy showed up, "How'd you locate me?"

"More arithmetic." Unless you knew him you'd swear he was all friendliness, slouched there with one hand still in his belt and the locket swaying. "Simple addition. You had a look in your eye yesterday when her with the shape dropped in. I figured you'd be back." He was looking over Zeb's head, down the now-shadowed beach. "You know, I've been feeling kind of mean about this. Me having it and her hunting for it. Don't you think she and me ought to talk it over?"

"You go up there," Holtz oared in, "and you're dopier'n I am, Malloy! You want the cops on our neck?"

"Oh, I wouldn't go up," Malloy said. He dangled the locket, smiling. "Zeb wouldn't either. He hangs around down here in what they call the public domain and sends signals. Telepathy, they call it. No need to go up."

But it couldn't be her. Helen was safe in the big house above, getting ready for her dance. Her date would call around nine and he was a right guy, she'd be safe with him . . .

He stared at the moving blur, seeing it resolve into a slight figure in shorts and jersey, approaching between tidemark and tide. She swung the sieve in her hand. Zeb tried to will her into turning, running, getting out of here.

Helen saw him and waved. He ought to call to her, warn her

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she was walking into trouble and that it was no use to count on a sick-heart coward to help her. But Malloy watched him with his smile gone thin, and he did not call.

She came directly to him. "Hi, Zeb. I didn't think you'd be here." Then he saw her stiffen, picking out those background figures, peering at the locket that swayed from Malloy's fingers.

In a small, flat voice she said, "You found it." Perhaps she read Malloy's face as he eased toward her. Or it could have been something in the air around him, the taint of evil. Her chin lifted. "Thanks," she said, holding her voice steady. "I'd planned to offer a reward. I haven't any money with me, but—"

Holtz laughed. When Holtzy brayed like that, he was nervous. The dope wasn't really bad, it was just that inside his head he had never grown up. But not so dumb he couldn't smell trouble.

"Let's talk about my reward," Malloy said. "Just you and me." Not turning, he said, "You two shove off. You know where to meet me."

"Zeb . . ." She was scared now, her voice wobbled. It was a direct, urgent appeal. "Zeb!"

He said with the fear solid in him, "Malloy, don't be a fool. Leave her be."

"You don't hear so well lately, boy." The fixed smile was on him, beating him down. "Shove off, I told you."

Holtz gaped at them, arms hanging slack, his eyes luminous-seeming in the twilight. Malloy said to him in his other voice, crisp and mean, "Take care of him. Get the creep out of my hair."

No middle ground. Rankin had said it, and he was a wise man, the blind man. You dropped back into self-hatred and a shame that would never release you, a prison worse than blindness. Or you met the loaded moment, willing yourself forward on legs turned to rubber. No safe and easy middle ground. Forward, or back.

Holtz was sidling in on him, not wanting to, worried but obedient.

"Helen." Zeb's voice was a thin sound coming to his ears from far away. "Beat it. Run!"

Holtz he could handle any time. The dope had a nose that, if you so much as flipped it, started to bleed. Zeb swung and landed and, as Holtz' hands came up, jackknifed him with a knee. Holtz flopped and rolled, scattering sand, fetching up against Malloy's legs. But the big guy came in fast with shoulders bunched and head low. Zeb's knuckles skidded off bone. He tried with the knee but found no target, only scissored hands that latched and heaved, tumbling him backwards.

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His head smacked a log; dazed, he tore at the hand that raked with clawed fingers for his eyes. Malloy's head slammed his chin, battering him back. He felt himself flipped as if weightless, then the clamping pressure of a forearm against his throat, crushing in on breath and life.

Zeb heaved and bucked, but the weight bore heavier on his back, the arm viced tighter under his jaw. Through the tumult in his ears he sensed a thud, a flat thump like a stick on rotten wood. The arm slackened. He bucked once more, hurling Malloy off his back and across the log. Caught Malloy as his shoulders lifted, slugged him and kept on slugging, hitting from his knees, feeling the jar of each solid impact clear to his shoulders.

Someone was calling to him, tugging at him, but he hunched over Malloy, pounding him, battering him against the log with fists gone slippery. He slugged till in a dim and muddled way he realised Malloy had quit trying to break loose.

Voice and hands got through to him. "No more, Zeb. Please—you'll kill him!" He staggered to his feet, sucking air in great gasps. The spinning world of shadow and risen moon steadied. Two scared white faces swam into focus.

With help, Holtz and those like him might stay safe on the middle ground, never amounting to much, but at least keeping out of trouble. Zeb panted at Holtz in language the dope would understand. "You keep away from him, see? I ever catch you with him again, I'll work you over good. Now, take off! You go up to my car and get in and stay there."

Holtz' panicky crashing through the foreshore brush diminished. Zeb turned then, and took Helen's hand. She was crying, the tears shone in moonlight.

"He won't bother you again," Zeb told her, the words coming clumsily through split lips. "Or me either." He felt big now, strong and sure. "Not him or anyone like him."

"Zeb, he isn't dead, is he? I hit him as hard as I could."

"You hit him?" There had been that sodden thump.

"With a piece of driftwood. He was choking you. *Oh . . .!*"

Crying again. She ought to be home. Zeb tightened his hand on hers and started them away from there, along the moon-flooded beach. He looked back once. Malloy was up and lurching towards the brush.

He didn't know how far Malloy might have carried his stupid caper. Chances were, Malloy himself wouldn't know. A week, a month, and Malloy's stolen car deal would explode in his face. But he wouldn't be taking a couple of stooges behind bars with him.

His face hurt, and the back of his head; he ached all over, and

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felt wonderful. But a minor puzzle remained. "Your date. You were going to that dance."

"He's gone down with chickenpox." The tears had stopped. Helen spoke lightly, in disgust. "Of all things! When a boy's sixteen, wouldn't you think he'd be through with childish ailments, Zeb?"

His picture of the assured cavalier deflated. White jacket and imported sports job improbable; his folks' car, maybe, if he rated a driver's licence.

"That's a shame," he said, almost meaning it. But his brain had been taking a holiday—too long a one. Now, with Malloy out of his life, he could see a number of things very clearly. For these years, it was with kids like him with the chickenpox that Helen Rankin belonged. "Look, I have to get you home, Helen."

"Couldn't we look for my locket? There's a wonderful moon. I know where it is, Zeb, I saw him drop it."

"You can come down tomorrow."

"You too?"

"Nope." Taking care of her was getting to be a habit. Perhaps he would never see as clearly as the blind man, but he knew it would be easier from here on to find his answers. Some he had already found: for now, it was better that he think and work and dream alone. Better for Helen, better for them both.

She poised above him on the steep path, gazing down. Zeb said to her gently, "I'll see you again. I've decided to go back to school this autumn. I want to be in your dad's physics class at MacBride. Will you tell him that?"

She was younger than he, she lived in a different world. But she understood.

"I'll tell him. I'll watch for you there, Zeb." She bent and touched his bruised mouth with a moth-wing kiss, and was gone, the dark path gulping her.

Zeb gave her time to reach her house, then started up with an owl sounding off behind him and another making mellow answer. The plans buzzing in his head didn't leave much space for a rod, not even a shiny job with plenty of chrome up front.

It came to him that he was unlikely ever to make a million or win the Grand Prix in a red Ferrari. But just possibly, one day in his forward reaching, he might marry the prettiest girl in the world.

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Motorist: someone who sits in his car and watches the pedestrians whiz by.

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No Other Elephant

By GERALD SPARROW

Reminiscences of the author's years as a judge in Siam

THE ten days I stayed with Henry Paget at Muang Sutep were the climax of my lotus days in Siam. For Henry, too, his first year as a resident assistant manager in the teak forests was unique. Life for him was never to be quite the same again. These were the halcyon days before the passions of revolution and war stirred South-East Asia.

As I settled down in Henry's bungalow at Muang Sutep the future storm had not yet cast its shadow. The 'twenties and very early 'thirties were, I think, the last days of the assured imperial splendour for England and Englishmen. We were not, of course, masters in Siam. The Siamese were the rulers, but the immense power and prestige of Britain overlapped into Siam. My court, the whole system of extraterritoriality, was proof of that. These vast forest leases, the best in the hands of British firms, was another. The Siamese King and princes, mostly English-educated and often retaining an affection for Britain and British ways and manners, was yet another. The British advisers were of course an additional proof of the overriding power of the Empire.

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The friendship between Henry and myself now grew so that we were friends completely loyal to one another. Our paths, it seemed, lay together. The most unexpected events had brought us both to Siam. We remembered the same England, and our attitude towards Siam was wrought by the same circumstances.

We rode next morning to the river, the scene of operations. Henry had two country-bred cobs that could carry us easily. These horses, a cross of local blood and imported Australian racing stock, were strong and lively. And very much alike. To distinguish them one was called Three Socks, the other Two Socks, for this was the only difference that one could easily see. They had far gayer and more romantic Siamese names. The mare I rode, the one with the three white socks, enjoyed the lovely Siamese name of Sai Sunee, captivating lightning.

I had never seen a major teak jam before. The river, a tributary of the Meiping, twisted suddenly here and one log of exceptional size had straddled the stream at this point, held firmly between either bank. Above it more than five hundred logs were held in a solid block. The great pressure tended merely to drive the pin log farther and more firmly into the banks.

No man or men could hope to dislodge it. Machines such as cranes could not have been brought through the treacherous swamp that fringed the river-bank for fifty yards on either side. It was elephant work.

Henry spoke to his headman, then explained the plan to me. " Six elephants will wade in with their mahouts and try to ease the pressure of the jam on the pin log. Then Pra Chorn will try to dislodge the pin log. If they fail we get nowhere. If they succeed there is danger, for the released logs will be swept down too fast and we have to get the elephants out undamaged."

The working elephants were lined up on the bank, Pra Chorn standing apart from the others with Nai Sorn talking to him in the language that good mahouts use when conversing with their beasts. He spoke in Lao, telling him of the task that lay ahead, reminding him of all the feats he had accomplished, saying that this, too, he, and only he, could do. And Pra Chorn seemed to comprehend.

Henry went up to him and stood by his side as the elephants that were to hold back the jam lunged one by one into the river, their mahouts riding them, their brown legs tucked in tightly beneath the great grey ears. One by one the brown bodies slid into the water treading gently, slowly, easing their way into midstream then across the river until they formed a line. As each beast advanced it had to push a path through the tightly packed logs and only the great strength of the beasts themselves and the cries of encouragement from the mahouts and some beating enabled them to do this.

The moment the line was formed Pra Chorn, without a word from Nai Sorn, plunged into the gap. I noticed that the mahout carried no stick.

" Pra Chorn will not have it," said Henry. " He only works if left to himself."

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In the water Pra Chorn seemed larger than ever. The whole of his great back was above water and his head and shoulders were clear to see and to guide him. He approached the pin log from downstream. For a moment he stood there silhouetted against the sky, a primeval frieze of dignity and power; then, in one sudden movement, he lowered his head, twined his tusk under the log, and heaved. The log stood fast. It was viciously jammed, but perhaps it was loosened a little for Pra Chorn seemed not the least disturbed.

He drew back and waited while the mahouts on the line of elephants above him urged their beasts to hold back the jam. Then, as suddenly as before, Pra Chorn stooped, this time to conquer. The log was free. With a gesture at once proud and contemptuous Pra Chorn took it in his great trunk and flung it behind him as if it were a toy. Then, picking his way with caution, he moved up the bank, the water and mud streaming from him, until he was on dry land again.

His work was done, but pandemonium broke out in the river. The line of elephants turned to regain the bank and as they did so the avalanche of logs came down swept by the current round the bend. Very quickly the beasts bunched together for protection from that ominous wall of wood. In one tight knot of struggling brown bodies they reached the bank. Pra Chorn regarded them with what appeared to be approval.

The whole operation had taken less than ten minutes, but the suspense had been intense. No one had known if Pra Chorn had not met a situation that even his enormous strength could not cope with. Up to the last moment it had seemed possible that the released logs would crush and maim the group of elephants who were now trumpeting on the banks, rolling in dry mud and behaving for all the world like schoolboys released from class.

" My God, I'm glad that that came off. Can you imagine having to send a message to Chiengmai saying that my whole forest was held up by a jam we could not dislodge? "

It was after ten now and the elephants would not work till sundown. One by one the mahouts tethered them in the shade of a mango grove and moved off into the jungle carrying their curved grass knives to collect fodder for their beasts—sugar-cane, soft branches, wild bananas if they could get them.

Henry and I mounted and rode back to Muang Sutep. Dining that night with Henry we wore the loose white singlet shirts and the short silk Shan trousers that were almost a relaxation uniform for the British teak men.

" Tomorrow we go out to Muang Lieb where they are felling. It's a wonderful sight the first time you see it. And I'll show you something else which you have never seen before."

We sat there on Henry's verandah after supper. All round us the jungle kept its secrets. Nai Rut, Tok, and two of Henry's foresters were playing cards in an opening by a fire that sent up a gay golden flame to the indigo darkness of the night. As we sat there a new moon peeped cautiously over the horizon.

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" A waxing moon for good luck, Gerald."

On the wall a lizard, the vociferous house lizard of Siam, let out its strange metallic croak. We counted its cries. At six it almost stopped, but managed one more fading cry.

" Seven. We are in luck."

" Henry, were you always superstitious? "

He thought a moment, then smiled. " It's the life, I think. One is so alone. The forest is so vast, one feels so small. 'He is Fear, O Little Hunter.' Do you remember? "

I nodded. Time to turn in. The young masters went to bed.

Henry rose at five, and I awoke because of the bustle, and the trumpetings of the elephants summoning their mahouts because they wanted to go down to the river and bathe. Elephants, I found, hate to miss their morning bathe. It is both cleansing, relaxing, and fun for them. Once in the water they wallow, they snort, they roll, and they send great sheets of water from their trunks to douse any unsuspecting visitor on the bank. The bath lasts the best part of an hour and is a daily ritual.

As breakfast was being prepared and Henry was making plans with his headman I strolled to the bank to watch the great brown bodies at play. It struck me that elephants were almost Roman in their attachment to the bath, and Roman, too, were their features, their great domed foreheads. They had even the Roman gravitas, the innate dignity and decorum that the Romans liked to attribute to good citizens.

Moreover the elephants, though they worked and were subject to authority, were not slaves. They had made a pact with man. Pra Chorn made his own working rules, but all of them resented being overworked and showed it plainly. A reasonable amount of labour they were willing to give, and when exhibiting their skills they even seemed proud and engrossed in the job they were doing.

Their relation to their mahouts was close. The man who fed and watered them was part master, part servant. They expected attention in sickness. If a mahout turned against his charge and was cruel and malicious the elephant would suffer in silence for a time, then obstruct in every way open to him. If no understanding was arrived at the life of the mahout became hell for, from moment to moment, he never knew when that great trunk would shoot out to seize him and dash his brains against the nearest tree, or that tremendous foot would fall on his reclining figure to flatten his face and head as if he were made of chocolate.

I walked back to the bungalow. Henry was cleaning his guns, breakfast was on the table. We sat on the verandah, a green sun-blind keeping the morning sun at bay.

In fifteen minutes we were off, marching in line through the forest, six elephants, led by Pra Chorn, and four ponies, a cavalcade. The forest made a cool green world of its own. Here even the Siamese sun could not penetrate. We glimpsed it far above us, lining the leaves with silver.

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After an hour's march we emerged from the thick forest and started to climb through open jungle, the teak country again.

By nine we had arrived. As we approached we heard the cries of Henry's men who were living in small attap huts on the scene of the felling. We arrived just in time. The saws and the axes were at work on a giant tree that rose a hundred and fifty feet straight as a mast to the sky. The brown bodies of the four men working were glistening in the sun, the sweat running freely from the open pores. Around their heads they had twisted checked Shan cloth to prevent the sweat running into their eyes.

With Henry I inspected the great tree more closely. It had been ringed and numbered the year before. S.M.392, a Siam Merchants' tree of fine quality, very straight and of good girth.

Henry asked his headman where the tree would fall. The man smiled and ran to place two twigs in the ground some fifty feet from us in an easterly direction.

"How much longer, Nai Suth?"

The man looked at his watch. "About six minutes, Nai." I glanced at my wristwatch. As the minutes and then the seconds went by a tension arose, for this was the death of a great living thing that had stood here greeting the sun and the rain for fifty years or more. Excitement grew even among the foresters. Henry said, "They say that one never gets used to it. Each tree is the climax of a story."

At that moment when my watch said five minutes forty-three seconds the great tree began to creak, a weird sound, the death-rattle of a giant. Then it began to sag. Would it fall as the headman said it would? I watched, fascinated. The men with the saw had ceased work but the two axemen continued to send their swinging blows straight into the giant's heart.

Then there was an indescribable sound, a roar, a crunch, and the two men ran for their lives. In one reverberating lunge that shook the forest the great teak tree came down.

Henry and I walked over to where it now lay, having flayed and flattened all that stood in its path. It had fallen, as Nai Suth had said, exactly between the two twigs he had placed in the ground.

We joined the workers. The men were still panting, but they smiled happily enough. All had gone according to plan. I asked whether this always happened.

Nai Suth answered, "Nearly always, Nai. Very rarely a tree will have a *pee*, an evil spirit. Then it will fall back on those who fell it, slaying them. I knew of one such case. It was a dreadful moment."

"Had there been a miscalculation?"

Nai Suth looked straight at me. "No, Nai. There had been no mistake. The tree fell against nature. It reached out to murder, and it did murder. The two axemen were pulp. Moreover it fell minutes before its time. It was an evil tree."

Henry smiled. "It's no good getting scientific with the Lao, old boy," he said. "They *know*—just like Christians."

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As we rode back Henry spoke to me of his life.

" At first I found the loneliness unbearable. But not now; I love the solitude of the forest. And I like these people. Growing and felling teak is a fine job. You can look ahead to those ship decks, all those good hard railway sleepers. It's a tough, trusty wood that never lets anyone down.

" There is only one black spot here—the opium.

" Next week we will ride out towards the French border. Then you will see. I do not know yet what it means in exact terms, but my guess is that the greatest opium empire of all time is being organised round us here, with tendrils that reach out to Harlem, San Francisco, Cairo, London, Paris . . .

" It's an evil business. The Lao do not take the drug by nature as the Chinese do. But more and more the men who work for Chow Kavalongse and the men behind him are being paid in opium. The more they smoke the less money they ask for. They are slaves within a year."

" There is nothing whatever you can do about it, Henry. It's not your business."

Henry considered this. The green eyes hardened for a moment. " It's everybody's business . . ."

The elephants led by Pra Chorn were returning with us. Henry asked me if I would like to ride Pra Chorn with him. I said I would. We handed the ponies to the syces and Nai Sorn threw a Shan saddle over Pra Chorn's back.

Henry went up first, I followed, swaying up on the moving trunk like a jockey having a leg up to his mount. Nai Sorn took up his position on Pra Chorn's neck.

" *Ow, pai! Pai!* "

Pra Chorn moved forward and for the first time I felt the lurching walk of the elephant from the beast's back. It was not unlike a ship at sea. After a few minutes I learnt to sway to the rhythm of Pra Chorn, who never varied his sedate pacing.

Henry smiled. " It's not like anything else on earth, is it? "

" No, it's unique. It's regal."

The men on foot looked smaller, puny in their white vests and coloured sarongs. Our heads brushed the lower branches of the trees. An impression of immense power came from the great body beneath us. This was how the kings of Siam and Burma, of Cambodia and of Laos had gone to war in the old days, raised high above ordinary mortals. We drew up at Henry's bungalow and dismounted, Pra Chorn obediently kneeling to make this easier.

There was a man waiting for us on Henry's verandah. It was with an inexplicable feeling of apprehension that I saw who it was: Chow Kavalongse, the young Lao prince.

I was sure that Chow Kavalongse had come to visit Henry on a fishing visit. He wanted to see for himself what kind of men we were and if we were likely to interfere with his business. It was certain that if we did he would find means of revenge—murder, if that was necessary.

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Henry whispered to me as we came up the path, " Kavalongse. Have to be very civil."

Chow Kavalongse came to meet us. " I hope you don't mind. I thought I would drop in on you. I have to be out here another week or so, and I have nothing to talk to my men about."

Henry smiled. " I know the feeling very well. You're in luck. We have some drink in the house, and my cook is not too bad."

That evening we dined together and at first no one could have behaved with more charm than Chow Kavalongse. It was only after we had drunk schnapps washed down by beer for over an hour with our curry that the young Lao began to reveal his mind

" This is excellent curry. Your cook really knows how to do it."

" Yes. It's an art to him. This great steaming bowl of rice, the finest, freshest patina. The best meat we can get and about a dozen herbs, spices, and powders. It takes him all day."

Chow Kavalongse considered this. He was drinking too fast now and his bronzed young face was flushed crimson.

" You get the best of everything here. Do you know what it was like fifty years ago? Then we were the rulers. All these forests were our forests—as far as the eye could see."

Henry interrupted. " Yes, but you did not look after them. You never replaced a tree. The forests would have been denuded in another twenty years."

Prince Kavalongse would not have this. " Suppose a qualified motor mechanic stole your car, would you agree with him if he said, 'You do not know how to maintain your car. So I am taking it from you. It will be perfectly run by me—' "

" Anyway the royalties of the Government have risen every year since we took over."

" Maybe, but not the income of the Lao princes. We, not the Siamese Government in Bangkok, owned this country."

" You've missed the boat, Kavalongse. You went on in your oldfashioned ways and the Siamese have made rings round you. You should have learnt the new techniques."

I think it was this thrust that angered Kavalongse. He never forgot it. His face contorted with anger.

" It's you who are the savages, not we," he said.

I thought it was time to intervene. Henry was not the most tactful of men. " Let's go for a swim. It will be cool now in the river and will wash the fumes away."

" Ah, the lawyer comes to compose our differences. Come on, Kavalongse. To the river."

We swam in the dusk in a pool where the water slowed its rhythm and the cool water sobered us. We went back to the bungalow to drink more beer, then Kavalongse called his men and, saying he would see us again, rode off into the night.

Henry looked at me. " A strange fellow, Gerald; now we know what he really thinks. They have lost the teak wealth. So they develop the opium harvest. That we can't touch, and the Lao land will still support the Lao princes."

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" A kind of poetic justice."

" There's no justice in it. If I can bust this racket I shall do so. It brings nothing but misery to the people here."

" You'll be floating head-down in a *klong* one of these days, Henry."

Henry laughed. " I'm lucky," he said.

Later that week I reminded Henry that he had promised to ride out with me towards the Indo-China border and he leapt at the idea.

" There is a lull in the forest work. We'll go tomorrow."

Nai Rut helped Henry's headman to get our gear ready. We should be away at least a week. The land between us and the border was almost uncharted. Where the teak forests ended there was over fifty miles of closer jungle, the country said to be inhabited by the *pee tong luang*, the fantastic little creatures, half man, half monkey, that were perhaps the true missing link.

Pee tong luang—the spirit that goes when the leaf turns gold—were so called because their only shelter was made in the open. First they made a " form " like a hare does, then they twisted over their bodies green foliage to protect them from the sun and the rain. When the green leaves turned yellow they moved on elsewhere. The Pee were said to have about fifty words, or sounds, and to bury their dead by tying the bodies to the topmost branches of trees, to be picked clean by the vultures. The legend of the *pee tong luang* added excitement to our journey.

I asked Nai Rut whether the Pee really existed, and he replied, " Oh yes, Nai. They come quite close to some remote villages at dawn to trade honey and orchids for flints and cloth. Only the men come. The women no man has ever seen."

On our journey we had time to talk and Henry returned to the topic of opium, which seemed to obsess him. " I'm taking you a little out of our direct route to show you the extent of the opium-growing, Gerald. In an hour or so you'll see the real source of the traffic. I believe it's vast. No one ever mentions it."

We reached a plateau that seemed to stretch for mile on mile with very few trees, and soon our path led through the poppies. The white sea stretched for as far as the eye could see. It was a white world we had entered.

" Now you see. Great stakes are here. There must be brains and wealth behind this business."

We rode for three hours through the poppy harvest and met not a soul, and then, unexpectedly, we came across a group of ten men under an overseer resting. Each man had his great, curved Lao knife, his short scythe by him. We halted and the headman said a few words to the overseer in Laos. The man nodded.

He was a tall Eurasian but the men under him were Lao peasants. Yet they were men apart. All were emaciated so that their yellow skins were taut and smooth over their bones. Only their legs and their arms were muscular. Their ribs poked aggressively through the skin. They were all smokers. Their eyes were drowsy now

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and I knew they had just had their pipes. They had an unreal look, the gaze of men who know that they have an unshared secret. They were indolent, almost insolent. But they were slaves.

The overseer had only got to stop a man's supply to reduce him within a day to a crawling, abject animal.

Henry said, " Now do you see? They are sold to the devil."

We rode on, the gaunt overseer watching us until we were out of sight.

That evening we left both the teak land and the poppy land behind us and entered the hot, steaming border country—the land of the little dwarfs whom the Lao called *pee tong luang*.

I had no idea at the time that the story of the *pee tong luang* was well authenticated over the years by the Siam Society; that these extraordinary little creatures, who appeared to be half man, half monkey, had been observed at fairly regular intervals by forest officers and other reliable witnesses.

King Chulalongkorn, the great King of Siam—who reigned nearly as long as Queen Victoria, and at the same time—had a Pee presented to him at his Court at Bangkok as a curio. At first he was tethered in a royal compound and fed on bananas and rice for he was not considered human. But later a chamberlain took pity on the little creature which was partly human, and had some words or sounds very like primitive Lao or Siamese speech.

The chamberlain took the Pee into his house, talked to him until the two could converse in very basic Siamese, and dressed the Pee as a royal page, teaching him to sit with his legs tucked under his panung and his head touching the floor when the King passed by.

Neither Henry nor I expected to see any Pee. It is characteristic of the jungle that one does not as a rule see its denizens. For instance, bears had been plentiful in the teak country through which we had passed. We had hoped to see a brown bear. We saw none. We glimpsed a small honey bear scampering away into a thicket out of range. Here in the close jungle snakes abounded. We never saw or trod on one. Only the monkeys were our constant companions, and the cry of the unseen barking deer. The cats, if they were near us, pursued their silent ways unseen by us.

We had nearly reached the border when we saw the two Pee. It was at dawn and both Henry and I had just moved out of our tents for our morning coffee which Tok brewed us. We were standing there, still and silent, sipping our hot drink, when Henry pointed to bushes at the end of the clearing not more than a hundred yards away.

There two little men were standing. The one in front whom we could see clearly carried a long stick that might have been a spear. Both were very small, less than four feet in height. The leader had very long hair grown down his neck and over his ears, but his skin was not dark. It was smooth and dull yellow. I thought the face was Mongolian, the little eyes were mere squints in his wrinkled yellow skin.

They must have seen that we had observed them for the front-

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man raised his hand and gave a cry and both loped off into the bush. Their movement was the oddest thing about them for it was not the walk of men but the movement of animals, startled.

We reported the matter later to the Siam Society in Bangkok.

Neither Henry nor I doubted for a moment that the two creatures were Pee men. They were erect, strong little figures. But they bore no resemblance whatever to the Lao country-folk, nor to any human man that I have ever seen.

Two days' more march and we were out of the thick jungle and approaching the border at Sak Saard, the Siamese outpost on the Meklong river, immediately opposite the French outpost town of Semasak. The two villages were little more than official posts where a French deputy governor and a Siamese amphur resided, together with a dozen policemen under the command of a captain.

The Amphur of Sak Saard, a Luang Promode, had heard we were approaching, for he rode out to meet us—a fat cheerful fellow who roared with laughter at his own jokes.

"I have arranged with my opposite number, Boisson, to dine together tonight. He has his Resident on an official visit and will be glad of an excuse to have the old boy entertained. It's our turn, so we are spending the evening on our side of the border—we take it in turns, you know. We hope you'll join us."

Henry said that there was nothing we should like more. Luang Promode looked after us as if we were weary children. He took us to his house, a fine white building made of local stone instead of teak. He ordered hot baths for us and when we had had them ordered four of his maids to massage us, which they did with great expertise, two working on Henry and two on me.

Then as we rested the girls fanned us with little round fans made of peacock feathers—one slow stroke and three fast. It was a delightfully sensuous and relaxing experience. After some iced beer that our host provided we felt ready for anything, though we did not expect the kind of evening that in fact was in store for us.

With no British Consul, no goodfellow, beer-drinking parson, but only a chapter of pious Buddhist priests who believed in prayer, meditation, and example and keeping to themselves, and, of course, no missionaries and no white memsahibs, Semasak had decided to enjoy itself with the means that the country offered. Those means were an endless supply of pretty young girls between the ages of fifteen and twenty, opium, and drink.

As we were to discover the Siamese did not smoke opium, but the French made up for this. On the other two counts a happy camaraderie had been established over the river across which, though there was no bridge, the sampans plied day and night.

Luang Promode said, "The French will be here in a few minutes. You will like them. Officially France and Siam are on rather strained terms. We cannot forget that they took so much territory from us including Angkor Wat, the ruined home of a great Khmer civilisation. But here in Semasak we are individuals. We run our little show, and we enjoy ourselves."

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Enjoyment, that was the keynote. I must say that the Siamese-French entente at Semasak had raised this worthy ideal to a high art.

Monsieur Boisson arrived with quite a retinue and his official superior, the Resident, a tall gaunt man in his fifties with a high bald domed forehead and bushy eyebrows that gave him the appearance of a disillusioned clown. His manners were beautiful.

We were introduced and Henry got on very well with the visitors, speaking his fairly fluent public-school French. Dinner was served by six girls who brought in the food in steaming bowls which they placed on the table together, Chinese fashion. We drank iced beer and a vin rosé the thoughtful Boisson had with him.

The Frenchman brought four girls with him; one, a Eurasian, appeared to be the temporary wife of Boisson. Another, Rada, was attached, for the evening, to Monsieur le Résident. Two charming little creatures with orchids in their hair and lovely hands with which they could speak appeared to be—available.

It was an unforgettable evening. I certainly have never forgotten it. By ten o'clock we had finished the gigantic meal of venison, ducklings, jungle pheasants, and fruit, and it was time for a little love-making. The Amphur's house had discreet rooms for resting, and the servants of the French brought in their opium.

The Eurasian girl, whose name was Annette, was an expert in preparing the drug for the pipes and her long fingers moved with incredible rapidity as she manipulated the roasting flame so that the opium was exactly right for the pipe. "It is an art," they explained. "Annette does it to perfection—and she is most amusing in love as well."

Soon the two men were stretched on their ebony couches resting their heads on their porcelain pillows, the girls beside them refilling their pipes. What with the food, the tobacco smoke and the opium fumes, and the scent of the girls, the atmosphere became heavy and I felt the urgent need of fresh air. I ran out with one of the girls towards the river. She turned to kiss, and this she did like a young animal, hungrily, demanding to be loved.

In Luang Promode's house the Frenchmen were now very happy indeed. I saw for the first time the effect of opium combined with alcohol. They were as men walking on air who seemed to have a sublime disdain for mortal cares and worries. They were emperors in a golden world of make-believe.

Luang Promode said, "I hope you have enjoyed your evening. And will remember it."

The French were returning to their own bank now, in surprisingly good order, their girls, still loving, chattering like gay and provocative magpies. We were alone with our host, and said good night. We had had a wonderful evening.

Next day Henry, to my amusement, was active and going through some papers he had brought with him. There was a sub-post office in Semasak. Henry wished to send two telegrams. One was to his assistant in Muang Sutep.

The other which he showed me was very different. It was

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addressed to Phya Indra, the Chief of Police, Bangkok, and gave him information, exact and full, as to the locations of growing the poppy illegally in the north-east.

" But why, Henry? The police are bound to institute a drive if you tell them this."

"That's what I want."

" But what about yourself? "

" I shall be all right. I'm not going to have all the labour here corrupted. Already my foresters are being lured away by Kavalongse."

" Henry, you know what may happen? "

" I hope to drive them out of this area."

" Before you do that, Henry, they will try to kill you. I don't know how, but they will certainly make an attempt on your life."

But Henry shrugged his shoulders and sent the telegrams for all to read . . . He said you could not just walk away from a nightmare such as this.

We talked too of the opium growers and of the great organisation that remained hidden just beneath the surface of the life of the north.

" It's not just the Chinese here, and the Lao workers who are affected. They are a very small part of it all, though this affects our teak business. Very large quantities of opium are being exported from Bangkok into the black market to reach the consumer as morphine. You know what that means? If a tired musician or a college kid in the States or in Britain starts to seek the golden dreams it means hell followed by death."

" Not your business, Henry."

" Oh, but it is. I'll tell you what happened a month ago. Two brothers came to work for me. They were old teak hands, had worked for thirty years in the forests and their father and uncles had worked before them, before our time, for Leonowens. You remember King Chulalongkorn gave the lease of a teak forest to the son of the famous Anna. Well, these two men, Nai Sord and Nai Chitra, had been tempted away by the lure of Kavalongse's quick harvest. They thought they could take the money, refuse the opium, and return to us.

" They tried. They tried very hard. But Kavalongse's manager refused to pay them all their wages in cash. Every night he would pay them two-thirds in cash, one-third in opium. They tried to sell the opium but the penalty for doing that was a beating with the rattan that tears the flesh. It is a torture. In the end they thought, Well, if we cannot sell it we must not waste it. Let's smoke it.

" The first two days they had nausea, but not the third day. On the third evening the opium started to work its wonder. They did not need more than three pipes to bring them that delicious sense of wellbeing, of being lords of creation."

" Could they stop? "

" No one can stop. After the harvest they returned to me, saying yes, they were smokers now, but they would give it up.

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"Would I take them on again?

"I said yes, if they really did not smoke again.

"For two days they worked without smoking. Then they came to me crawling along the ground, raising their hands above their heads in supplication. They were human snakes, not men. They begged and implored me to give them some opium to smoke. I refused. They crawled out into the night. Towards dawn I was woken by screams and cries of agony. It was the two brothers having the horrors in their tent. Do you know what that's like? They were writhing on the floor, cringing, crying out, blinded with pain and delusions. I ordered my headman to get pipes for them at once. They each sucked four pipes dry in a matter of moments and were human again."

"Where are they now?"

"They are here, working for us, smoking their pipes at night. They are slaves. I could pay them nothing tomorrow but opium. They would not mind. I could beat them. They would lick my boots. Before, they were merry and proud, free men. And now they are not human any more."

"So you really intend to break the racket if you can?"

Henry smiled. "Yes, I'll break it."

When he said this he was arrogant and quiet. He really meant it. His obstinacy had a certain grandeur. My affection for Henry increased. Early next morning I left, sorrowfully, for Chiengmai.

I returned to my work at the International Court in Chiengmai and now found that I knew much more of the background of the cases I had to try. Besides, I was learning Siamese, and though I never completely mastered the tones of the intricate language, I could, with the help of an interpreter, be effectively briefed in each case before mounting those two steps through the damask curtains that led to the Bench.

Christmas came very quickly. And everyone in Chiengmai enjoyed Christmas. For although all Christian festivals, including the Sabbath, were not, of course, Buddhist festivals, the people of Buddha knew a good thing when they saw it, and happiness was the best thing of all.

Henry, I remember, did not get back until Christmas Eve, riding into my compound very early one morning on his pony Sai Sunee, which he had brought with him in the hope of polo on the field of the little Gymkhana Club.

He waved to me as he came up the drive.

"Here we are! Get up, man. It's a wonderful morning."

I was breakfasting on my verandah in my dressing-gown. Tok ran to prepare another breakfast for Henry.

"Come and sit down. You look indecently fit. By the way I have a letter for you, addressed in round, tender handwriting."

It was a formal little note from Wanta, the elfin, beautiful young niece of the Prince of Chiengmai. It was written in her schoolgirl English beginning "Dear Mr. Paget" and asking Henry—and

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myself—to a picnic that the family were having on Doi Sutep, the great hill, on Christmas Day.

"Shall we go?"

"Why not? You must pay the penalty for your charm, old boy." Henry laughed. "So be it."

We spent that evening at the club, drinking, meeting the community, playing poker, and, very late at night, dancing. But next morning we were up at dawn.

Wanta had told Henry we were to meet at the foot of the hill. We could motor to the end of the road, then the party would go up together, the men on ponies or elephants, the women in chairs.

We arrived early and the Chow Luang and his family who had a villa on the hill had not yet arrived. The servants were all there busily cutting poles and strapping them with banana tissue to the chairs that were to carry the women.

Four of the Chow Luang's elephants, with their mahouts, were tethered in the clearing.

"Look at them, Gerald, scraggy-looking beasts." He was, I knew, thinking of his own Pra Chorn, that great elephant who had become his friend.

At that moment the cavalcade of cars carrying the Chow Luang and all his family approached in a swirl of dust from the direction of the town. The rains had long ceased now and the dust lay thick on the roads. But the winter mornings sparkled gay and clear and cool, and only the midday heat remained to remind us that this was Siam.

Out of the first car, a stately but vintage Daimler, stepped the Prince of Chiengmai, in purple panung and white silk high-collared coat. He came forward to greet us and again I was impressed with his kingly bearing. He was only a little king, perhaps, but he was the Prince of a proud people and he had the kingly qualities of graciousness and charm, and simplicity. He represented a tradition and a pride and an assured philosophy that had already departed.

He greeted us in the friendliest way and waved to his family who followed him. "You know this rabble by now, I think. All my wicked children!"

The wicked children included, I noticed, both Chow Dam and his half-brother, Chow Kavalongse. Both the young men were on their best behaviour. Could it be that they had not yet heard that Henry had wired the Chief of Police in Bangkok concerning the opium, or did their friendliness hide their true designs? I could not determine.

Wanta was with the women and looked lovelier than at our last meeting. I knew at once she was in love with Henry. When she saw him she left the women and walked over and *wei*'d to him. That elfin little face, alive with passion and mischief and gaiety, sank into her hands. Henry smiled and returned her greeting so expertly that for a moment I was startled. I had not realised that he could be graceful in a Lao medium. He spoke to her, too, in

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Siamese, but she answered in English, and I could not help thinking that her English was greatly improved.

Neither of the two brothers showed anger with their sister. The Chow Luang was lifted with ceremony on to the first elephant. Wanta and Henry rode the second. I rode with Chow Kavalongse, and Chow Dam with a minor wife of the Prince rode the last beast. The rest of the party were carried in the chairs or rode the ponies, and the retinue of servants, not less than twenty men, brought up the rear on foot. The Chow Luang's elephant swayed towards the mountain path, and, one by one, we all followed.

At just over two thousand feet the Chow Luang held up his hand. The cavalcade halted. From here there was a view of the plain, simmering now in the growing heat of midday, yet the air on Doi Sutep was as cool and fresh as the stream that cascaded into a pool at this point.

Chow Kavalongse leapt from our elephant. "Come on, some beer for breakfast."

We sat there in a huge circle drinking and eating. The old Prince said, "You make me very happy. As one grows old the laughter of the young is like the music of the gods."

Wanta smiled. "It is a magic day, Uncle," she said. "The spirit of the mountain is happy today."

Chow Dam laughed. "It's the iced lager, Wanta, not the spirit of the mountain."

Wanta looked at him gravely. "Unbeliever," she said.

We travelled two more hours to the Chow Luang's "bungalow," five hundred feet below the summit of Doi Sutep. From the verandah of the straggling white house the view of the plains, five thousand feet below, stretched as far as Lampoon, fifteen miles to the south, where the best Thai silk is made. We rested the horses and the elephants for the sun was high now and we had a siesta, but as evening approached four Kamu servants lit a bonfire and in its blaze roasted two sucking-pigs.

Henry and Wanta decided to swim and plunged into the cold water of a pool that had been dammed up for this purpose. The others were still reluctant to stir.

Wanta swam as Siamese children do, as a fish does, naturally. When her long hair came over her face she swam round blind; then sat on the rock combing her hair. Henry sat beside her.

"Mermaid!"

She said not a word but turned her wet face towards him and kissed him. She would never have done this in public unless she was enflamed with love. She did not care, or she was proud of her infatuation.

We feasted that night on the mountain and it was dawn before we reached my house. Before we turned in I asked Henry what was going to happen.

"I'm going to marry her."

"Marry her! But she's Siamese. In any case the family will fight against it. You know that?"

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" I'm going to ask the Prince's permission tomorrow. I want you to come, too. I shall need support. You will, won't you? "

" I think it's madness—yes, I will."

" Good. Good night."

I do not know if Henry expected a smooth passage when he and I presented ourselves at the Chow Luang's Palace that Boxing Day. The house, I thought, was ominously quiet. Not a soul was in sight. We were kept waiting nearly half an hour in that gold-and-red room. Then Wanta entered, kissed Henry, and said, " He's coming now." She vanished.

When the Prince came in it was obvious that he was deeply disturbed. He said, " Sit down, please. Wanta has told me of your mission. I can never agree. She is only seventeen, and a princess by my first wife. I intend to marry her to a Shan prince. Our families are very close. He is a good man and she will have a life of dignity and respect among her own people."

Henry said he loved Wanta. That was the important point, and she loved him. He begged the old man to think again.

But the Chow Luang was adamant. " I might have been able to help you," he said, speaking to Henry, " but you have meddled in our affairs. Three police officers arrived in the city from Bangkok on the express last night as a result of the telegram you sent the Chief of Police. Their inquiries can only lead to trouble, great trouble for us—and for you."

So that was it. If it had been a question of Wanta alone the Prince would probably have yielded to the persuasion of Henry, and the pleading of Wanta, but opium, that was another matter . . . Both his nephews were deeply involved. The House of Chiengmai saw in the profits of the poppy harvest the means to revive their old glories. That Henry, a new Englishman, should not only work for the people who had " stolen " their forests, but should try to kill their new source of wealth, was unforgivable.

The Prince sighed. " You have behaved recklessly and dangerously. You are treading in a country where you have no idea of what the currents are, of the dangers of dagger and gun and poisoned cup. I have warned you because I would like you to live."

Henry rose and beckoned to me. " Let us go. There is no more I can say."

The adamant refusal of the Chow Luang to allow Wanta to marry Henry or even to see him cast a cloud over the remaining days of Christmas week. Henry played some very energetic polo, while I played golf. At night we drank with the young men from the forest and gambled. Then Henry had to leave for his post again. He started off on the long journey to Muang Sutep. He left before dawn and he did not wake me. We had said good-bye the night before.

It was lonely and rather dull after Henry had gone. Though he always seemed to seek trouble, love, too, pursued him. Life was a magical moving thing as led by Henry.

Two evenings later I entered the bar of the Gymkhana Club

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hoping to get a game of poker. It was empty except for Chow Dam. He had been drinking alone, but this did not account for the menace of his expression.

"Do you know what has happened? Did he tell you?"

"No. What are you talking about?"

"Henry Paget. The morning he left. He smuggled Wanta out of the Palace. They had it all arranged. Her maid went with her. My uncle is very angry. He must pay the penalty."

"But where are they now?"

"They are at Muang Sutep. At Paget's bungalow. Living together as man and wife."

"He never told me a thing of this."

Chow Dam drained his drink. "He will die." He said this with an absolute conviction, but whether Henry was to die by dagger, gun, or poisoned cup he did not say.

It was the custom in the Siamese Service for the foreign officials in the provinces to visit Bangkok once a year, usually to attend one of King Prachadipok's Courts, to be seen—and to be remembered. In the case of Siamese officials they made the pilgrimage to take the water of allegiance in a ceremony presided over by the King in the Grand Palace. Absolute loyalty to an absolute monarch was, of course, the basis of Siamese Society.

The advisers and British judges did not participate in this ceremony, for they had a primary allegiance to their own King, and they could not even wear a Siamese Order—the Order of the White Elephant or the Crown of Siam—without the permission of King George, signed by the King himself.

I made the trip in June in that 1932. Unwittingly I chose a month, even a day, that was to change Siamese history.

I stayed at the Trocadero Hotel, which was owned and run by a member of the Bunnag family, a great Siamese clan who came, originally, from Persia. Their crest is still the crescent moon.

I did not expect to spend more than ten days in Bangkok, leisurely, unhurried days, during which I would call at the Ministry, witness the Swing Ceremony, and attend a Court that the King was to hold on the eve of his departure for his Summer Palace, a hundred miles south of Bangkok on the Gulf of Siam.

The Swing Ceremony is the Siamese version of the Royal Bounty. We all assembled, in our white-and-gold uniforms, on the courtyard, the pagodas, and the steps of Wat Lieb, the Temple of the Buddha, to await the King's arrival at three o'clock. King Prachadipok was punctual, a habit he had formed at Eton and had been unable or unwilling to shed. It was most unusual for Siamese princes to be punctual. Punctuality being the politeness of princes was, they thought, dangerous foreign nonsense.

Dead on three, the five canary Rolls-Royces, with the red Garuda emblazoned on the back panel, drew up at the steps of the Wat. Out of the second car stepped the King, a nimble alert little man wearing a canary panung and white coat. He quickly mounted

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the steps to the chief pagoda, smiling acknowledgment of the genuflections of his courtiers. I was standing on the pagoda steps two yards behind the King and noted his quick movements, and the complete lack of grandeur that was characteristic of him. He made a sign and the ceremony began.

In the square immediately in front of us was the great red swing, over a hundred feet in height, with its towering tapered summit. It is there today. Swung between the extremities of this lovely teak swing was the " boat " that carried three men. They were up there now as, gently at first, the boat began to swing to and fro against the hard blue brilliance of the sky. We all craned our necks and watched fascinated.

The Royal Bounty, in the form of newly minted coins, hung high on the panoply, well out of reach, it seemed, of those who sought it, the three men in the boat. But the boat was swung higher, ever higher, until it seemed at the end of the seesaw to hover in a dangerous hesitation, as if not sure whether to right itself or to tip its occupants to death on the hot red pavement down below.

Now one of the men leaned far out of the boat at the apex of its flight and tried to seize the treasure in his teeth. Twice he failed. He could not surely fail a third time, not with his King watching. Nor did he.

On the third swing he appeared to be almost airborne, so far did his body stretch out from the swinging cage. There was a gasp from the crowd collected on the far side of the square. For a moment tragedy seemed inevitable, but he recovered his balance—and the little bag of treasure was held firmly in his teeth.

Once again the Swing Ceremony of Siam had reached its climax in a burst of cheering. Then silence fell as the King re-entered his car. The King was never cheered, but greeted with genuflection, the kneeling crowd raising their hands in prayer and salutation.

In a moment the cavalcade of cars was under way. The supreme Prince of the Siamese People had returned to his Palace.

Nor was this the only ceremony on that memorable day, for in the evening I attended a Court. The last Court ever to be held by a Siamese king as absolute monarch.

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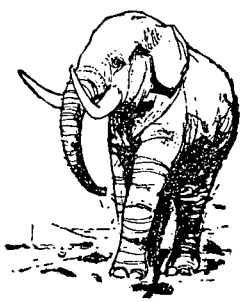
Next month: the author at Court, and final adventures



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HOLIDAY for an unhappy man

By BORDEN DEAL

JOHN SMITH—that really was his name, so innocuous he didn't even have to change it—was on the beach when he heard the knock at the door. But even at that distance the sound thrilled through him like a shot. He jerked up out of the beach chair, his hands trembling, and then he subsided again. It was only the waiter with his breakfast on the tray.

John Smith wrapped his robe around him, took one last look at the deserted morning beach, a regretful look, and plodded up the path to the cottage.

Every morning now, for two weeks, the waiter had brought his breakfast and his lunch and his dinner to him, bicycling down the winding path from the massive white hotel-block a quarter of a mile down the beach with the tray balanced impassively on his head. And every morning, noon, and night, John Smith was startled and shocked by the intrusion into his little pool of peaceful waiting; each time he was sure, down under the thinking, down in the bone marrow, that the time had come.

He opened the screen door on to the sun porch, after washing the sand off his bare feet with the hose. Aaron was placing his breakfast carefully on the round table in the centre of the sun porch.

"Good morning, Aaron," John Smith said.

"How are you keeping, Mr. Smith?" Aaron said in his soft voice. "It's a bright day."

Every morning for the two weeks Aaron had said exactly the same words in the same gentle manner, and it was the only voice that John Smith had heard during all that time, except for the distant cries of happy holidaymakers down on the beach.

This time, though, John Smith kept on looking at him. "Aaron," he said abruptly, "are you happy?"

Aaron was opening the door, holding the empty tray balanced in his hand. He turned slowly, looking at John Smith. His face was puzzled. He did not expect such a personal remark from one of the masters. They came from the United States in the big airliners that roared down so close to the hotel on take-off and landing; they romped and hollered in the surf and spent money

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An ALFRED HITCHCOCK Choice . . .

on tips and in bars and Free Port shops, and all their conversation was Good Morning and Good Afternoon, Please and Thank You.

"Happy, sir?" Aaron said.

But John Smith had already given up. It did not matter to him if Aaron were happy now in his present servitude, even with a white jacket and a bicycle and the talent of balancing a loaded tray on his head.

John Smith sat down at the table and unfolded his napkin. He looked up, seeing Aaron still standing there, and he frowned.

"What do you want?" he said.

Aaron looked even more perplexed. "You asked if I were happy, sir," he said. "I was trying to think. I . . ."

John Smith leaned forward. "Isn't there anything you want?" he said. "Anything in this world that you don't have now?"

Aaron was still held by his puzzlement. "I have a job," he said. "It is a good job, and no one else in my family has a job

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like it. I own my own bicycle, to go back and forth to work. One of these days, if I am good enough and last long enough, I will take Felix's place as headwaiter and then my tips will be larger." He was very serious as he stated these facts. "Yes, sir. I am happy."

"Wouldn't you like to go to the States?" John Smith said. "Wouldn't you like to become an American citizen?"

Aaron shook his head. "I had not thought on it," he said in his soft voice, with his quaint, slightly archaic phrasing.

John Smith looked at his hand, clenched on the table. He had not known it was clenched until he felt the numbness and the coldness of his flesh.

"Would five hundred thousand American dollars make you any happier than you are now?" he asked, unflexing the fingers and moving them on the table. "Five hundred thousand American dollars in hard cash?"

"Five hundred thousand?" Aaron's eyes were big with incomprehension of the figure. "Dollars?" he said.

"Yes," John Smith said impatiently. "You would think that much money would make any man happy, wouldn't you?" He brooded down at the table. "I thought so, once. I was sure, once. But now I know it's not so."

He turned his head, looking hard at Aaron. "Do you know why it's not so? Because they're going to find me. It might be today, it might be tomorrow, it might be next week or next year. But one of these days they will find me. And then—then they will kill me."

Aaron was still staring at him. He held the tray in one hand and the doorknob in the other, and he was so still he looked like a giant sized doorstop placed by the hotel as a decoration.

"So you see?" John Smith said. "I have five hundred thousand dollars and I'm not happy."

Not quite that much now, he thought in his book-keeper's mind, remembering the bribes to get the money through customs. Aaron kept on staring at him, and it made John Smith angry. He was likely to fly off the handle these days, he was as touchy as an invalid with his emotions.

"Don't you believe me?"

"Sir?" Aaron said.

"Come here," John Smith said. "I'll prove it to you."

He went into the bedroom of the cottage. He came back dragging a blue canvas bag that looked like a stuffed accordion. He pulled it out on the sun porch where he knelt over it, fumbling for his key ring. He opened the bag and spilt its green treasure over the floor, the bundles slipping and sliding over each other.

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He looked up into Aaron's face. "All my life I wanted to be a book-keeper," he said. "That's all I ever wanted to be. I didn't even call it accounting, I called it book-keeping, and that was big enough for me. I put myself through a business college by working all day and going to school half the night. I did that for six years, and then I could get a job as a book-keeper, and I was very happy."

He stared up at Aaron, who was staring down at the money. Aaron was tall, slim, with a bold, strong face. Though John Smith ate more meat in one year than Aaron had eaten in his whole life, Aaron was neatly, smoothly muscled, with the cheer of good health in his flesh.

John Smith, on the other hand, was short, dumpy, his breath shallow in his lungs, tiring easily in the gentle surf of the beach when he went swimming.

"Yes," he said to Aaron. "I was happy then. I thought I was, anyway. I worked for five years as a book-keeper, the whole five at the same place of business. Then I changed."

He stared down at the green flood at his feet. "I changed for money. Somehow or other, somewhere or other, the itch for money had got hold of me. I don't know why. You don't expect money for book-keeping, not much anyway, and I had known that from the beginning. But I was offered the one kind of book-keeping job that could pay more than even a good accountant could earn in a year."

He stopped. He looked at Aaron. "Are you listening?"

"Sir?" Aaron said. His eyeballs shifted in their sockets to look at John Smith, then back at the money, and back again.

"It was with the Syndicate," John Smith said. "Keeping books for their numbers organisation. It required a high degree of discretion and skill and—" he paused delicately—"dedication. I had the necessary requirements."

John Smith reached down and picked up one of the bundles of money. He bounced it in his hand almost absentmindedly, staring at it hypnotised. Aaron's eyes followed the movement up and down, up and down.

"I was happy again. This time it was good for about three more years. I even got married, with the new big salary I was making, and bought myself a house in the suburbs. I commuted to work like a stockbroker. I made money in the market."

He dropped the bundle of money back on to the pile. "But then I got to wanting even more," he said. "I had the hunger in me. And who were they to report an embezzlement to the police? They were illegal anyway, and so it would not be a crime. So I waited my time, until I had a clear five hundred thousand, until I

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thought it was worth the risk. And then I skipped out. I headed for warmer climes and happier times."

He shivered. It was a warm morning, the breeze was fine and soft off the Caribbean, but he shivered. The shivering went on until it became a trembling that he could not control.

He clenched his hands together and went back to the table. He took one hand, carefully, and picked up a cup of coffee with it and drank the hot liquid, the coffee spilling over his chin. But it helped, it steadied him.

"They have their own police, their own organisation," he said. "Better than I had thought. They nearly got me in Mexico City. And one of these days . . ." He stopped, unable to say the words. He looked out of the latticed walls of the cabin, fearfully, as though he could hear their hard American footsteps on the concrete paths that ran between the cottages.

"So don't want so much, Aaron," he said. "Keep happy, as they say here. Keep well. Be content with your white jacket and your bicycle and your fine job. Don't even want to be headwaiter in time. Don't even want that. Just keep happy."

"Yes, sir." Aaron said.

John Smith knelt on the floor and began scooping the money into the canvas suitcase. His hand raked and plunged among the bundles. He finally finished and zipped the bag closed, locked it.

He looked up into Aaron's face. Moved by a sudden, unfathomable impulse, he unlocked and unzipped the bag and took out one of the bundles. He handed it to Aaron.

"Here," he said. "For you. Have a bit of happiness for yourself." His mouth twisted with the scornful words.

Aaron dropped the tray with a clatter. He stared down at the money in his hand. He could see that it was a bundle of hundred-dollar bills, so thick and heavy in his hand he had no idea how many there could be. It was more than he had ever seen in his whole life.

"Sir," he said in a choked, grateful voice. "Sir, you are too kind, too generous . . ." He went down on one knee in a graceful archaic gesture of gratitude as he grabbed and kissed John Smith's hand.

John Smith could not bear the gesture. He snatched his hand away. "Take it," he said. "Enjoy it. It's yours. It's a tip."

He walked over to the table, staring down at his breakfast, feeling wrung-out and empty. "Go away now," he said. "I've got to eat before this gets any colder than it already is."

He did not look at Aaron again, for he could not bear the naked gratitude. He bent over the table, eating, hearing the sound of the door opening, the chain of the bicycle, and then the soft swish

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of the tyres going away. He raised his head, looking blankly out to sea. "There is one bundle of it they will never get," he told himself. "One bundle at least they'll never see again."

He finished his breakfast. He went out to the beach, and swam, and lay in the sun, and waited. He came back for his lunch, served this time by a man who told him that Aaron had taken the day off, and took a nap afterwards, and in all the doing of his day he was waiting, as he waited all the time now, for them to catch up with him. He knew it would happen sooner or later; he was resigned to the lonely fate he had stored up for himself.

It was late, and the sun was slanting low over the water when he went to the beach again. He swam, and then he lay back in his beach chair with his sunglasses on to watch the sun sink beautifully into the beautiful Caribbean.

Later on there would be stars, and the sound of calypso music from the distant terrace of the hotel, and an occasional sparkle of happy laughter on the breeze. One night there had been donkey races down on the beach and he had watched from in front of his cabin, participating vicariously though he had not dared go near.

He lay back in his chair, feeling the burden of waiting heavy in him, and watched the sun slip beneath the horizon. The sunsets were so gorgeous here they gripped his soul.

The water darkened quickly until only a distant white triangle of sail stood out. He got up to look at it, to watch the golden glow slip away from it, too. There was a rough native boat nearer to shore, the kind they used to peddle hats and fruit and seashells to the bathers up and down the beach.

He watched as it slipped closer and closer to the beach, lying low in the water, dark with the going of the sun. He did not move; he saw the boat grounded against the beach and he saw the figure slipping out of the boat.

He recognised Aaron, even without the white jacket, his upper body bare and glistening from the water, the terrible strain on his face.

He saw the knife in the same instant, and he knew that the waiting in him all day had been for Aaron instead of the others. He had known, from the instant he had handed Aaron the notes, that he would return for the rest. But he had not let himself know. In that one gesture, he had chosen his own executioner.

He knew that it was no good to try to escape. He did not even want to try. But he got up and began to run in the heavy-footed sand. Behind him, nearer and nearer, he could hear the frightened panting in Aaron's lungs. © HSD Publications Inc.

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Tours de Force

Travel broadens the behind

We piled into waiting buses, which were roasting already with a dry heat to which we would add succulence, like joints in an oven. We were under the intellectual auspices of our lecturer on Byzantine Art . . . The buses were held up on the straight road by a cavalcade of Albanian gypsies, with their women in bright scarlets and blues, white-kerchiefed, and riding side-saddle on asses. Archaic, really biblical-looking, and gay. For a touch of the grotesque, they had monkeys, some riding on top of covered carts, and one careering about and annoying the family goats. It would have been fun to stop and try to make some sort of contact, even if only by photographing them, but it's little use tantalizing ourselves with this sort of impromptu deviation from schedule. "Forward!" is today's watchword. "Excelsior!" tomorrow.

HAZEL THURSTON, *From Darkest Mum*

Inn-Sight

Why go to Paris, you travelling swells,
When you've never had fun in our country hotels?
There isn't a bath, and the bell doesn't ring,
But you don't come to Britain for that sort of thing.

Come to Britain! The rooms are so old
And so picturesque that you won't mind the cold.
The bed's over there and the light's over here;
Don't put out your boots if you want them this year;
The maid has a beard, the cold mutton perspires,
But come to Britain and visit the Shires!

A. P. HERBERT, *Come to Britain*

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One-Night Stands

Of course, you may always have a room reserved in advance: and if you receive a confirmation from an Italian hotel stating that a room has, in fact, been reserved for you, that may mean many things. It does not even entirely exclude the possibility that a room has been reserved for you. But it would be almost enchanting naiveté to count on it.

GEORGE MIKES, *Italy for Beginners*

A Likely Traveller's Tale!

His house, his home, his heritage, his lands,
The laughing dames in whom he did delight,
Whose large blue eyes, fair locks, and snowy hands,
Might shake the saintship of an anchorite,
And long had fed his youthful appetite;
His goblets brimm'd with every costly wine,
And all that mote to luxury invite,
Without a sigh he left, to cross the brine,
And traverse Paynim shores, and pass earth's central line.

LORD BYRON, *Childe Harold*

Lovely Camels . . .

"No, Persia wasn't all depressing. Beautiful Ispahan and Shiraz. Wicked, pompous, oily British. Nervous, cunning, corrupt and delightful Persian bloody bastards. Opium no good. Persian vodka, made of beetroot, like stimulating sockjuice, very enjoyable. Beer full of glycerine and pips. Women veiled, or unveiled ugly, or beautiful and entirely inaccessible, or hungry. The lovely camels who sit on their necks and smile. I shan't go there again."

Letter from DYLAN THOMAS,
quoted in JOHN MALCOLM BRINNIN'S *Dylan Thomas in America*

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The castle is a gallant keep and one you're bound to view;
A military pensioner will kindly take you through,
Rehearsing inexhaustibly the plots and counterplots
That made it insalubrious for Mary Queen of Scots.

ARTHUR GUITERMAN, *Edinburgh*

Guide Verte

Frau Storker began just then to clamber up the Pyramid of the Sun, and Countess Potolska [who was learning to be a guide] welcomed the diversion. The old woman went up the sloping stone straddled on all fours like a walking bear or sidling crab.

"Why are you doing that?" called Countess Potolska, beginning to laugh, starting forward. "There are steps up—up the front side."

"I know, I know," gasped the tall old woman, turning, thrown back half lying up the stone. She gave herself a few seconds to catch her breath. Then she reached up and pushed back the strands of hair her inverted position had loosed over her face. "The tourists have to photograph each other, you know," she said, looking down as Countess Potolska came to the rim of the pyramid base. "Unlikely places. Unlikely places. All that will do for some of them."

Countess Potolska laughed. "But you don't have to climb up like that, even so," she said.

"Oh yes, oh yes. I try it, you know. Can't afford to *lose* one of them. I'm responsible for them."

"Well, they're not children," Countess Potolska laughed up from the foot of the pyramid.

"No? No? You'll see . . ." She began to slide down. "No, no," she said at the bottom, brushing the dust from her hands with smart spanks and turning to survey the surface she'd just descended, "they'll not tumble down from there."

WILLIAM FIFIELD, *The Sign of Taurus*

To Travel Hopefully . . .

Let beeves and home-bred kine partake
The sweets of Burn-mill meadow;
The swan on still St. Mary's Lake
Float double, swan and shadow!
We will not see them; will not go,
To-day, nor yet to-morrow;
Enough if in our hearts we know
There's such a place as Yarrow.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, *Yarrow Unvisited*

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RETREAT INTO DANGER

Her dark eyes turned on him.
" You've got two choices," she said

BY EDWARD LINDALL

FROM the top of the rocky escarpment Kingston could see the ant-size figures of the girl and the man riding through sparse pines towards the creek. A saddled lead horse walked beside them. A frown deepened the trouble on Kingston's lean face, shadowed the grey eyes. For two days he had been watching for the girl to show, with a mixture of irritation and supremacy. Supremacy because he was certain she could not locate him again; irritation because she had forced him into hiding.

Now the irritation was overlaid with anxiety. The supremacy had gone. The man, whoever he might be, had introduced another factor. " Damn it," Kingston muttered. " Six square miles of empty bushland and I can't be left alone."

He moved back from the edge, and a piece of rock broke off, slid away down the initial steep incline to collect a tail of stones, then jumped out into space. He checked the curse that sprang out of his frazzled nerves. It didn't matter, he told himself. The fall wouldn't necessarily betray him. The escarpment there was all weathered rock, cracked and brittle with old age. Chunks were always breaking off.

He went slowly back to his painting easel, and the uneasy quietness he had known in the past two days had lost even its pretence of peace. He looked blankly out to the mountain walls three miles away, all purple and dark green with the shadows of afternoon, each tree and bush so clearly outlined they seemed near enough to touch.

This clarity of air, so clear it seemed almost to possess a light blue colour of its own, was a feature of these Flinders Ranges, humping out of the flat plains of northern South Australia. It was even more pronounced here in the tranquil dreamland of Wilpena Pound. Wilpena, the " place of crooked fingers," so named by the ancient aborigines because stark peaks stabbed up

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from the mountains enclosing it like the upturned fingers of joined hands. Its only entrance was a narrow gorge through which tumbled the clear waters of Wilpena Creek, now visible as a thread of deeper green lying looped among the trees. And outside the entrance, amid gums and pines, sprawled the tourist chalet from which the girl and the man had come.

Kingston began to paint again, his face grim with enforced concentration. His wide, mobile mouth was tight with it; his lithe body, with its suggestion of steel-wire strength, was stressed enough to twang. He tried hard to paint, but the brushstrokes were too bold. Subtlety was needed to catch the translucence of clear air, the motionless serenity of trees, the remote, imprisoning dignity of the mountains . . . He didn't have it. Perhaps he never would again, he thought. There was too much on his mind.

It wasn't the man and the girl, although, with the pressure of immediacy, they threatened his security. The girl had ridden in on him two days before, when he had been painting in his original camp in an elbow of the creek a thousand feet below. Ridden in silently along a stretch of sand so he hadn't heard anything until her voice had douched him, quiet and cool, like creek water without the little chuckle.

"Good morning," she had said. "Have you a permit to camp here?"

Startled, he had dropped his paint brush in the sand. He had taken his time about picking it up, cleaning it slowly on his left palm as he turned, needing the breathing space to recover his composure. His nerves were taut and jumpy.

"No," he said tightly. "Have you a permit to ask?"

"As deputy warden of the Pound, yes," she said coolly, looking down on him from the vantage point of her tall black horse. "I have every right to ask."

"Deputy warden?"

"To my father, Alex Stewart. He manages the chalet."

A sense of unreality began to steal on Kingston as he regarded her, this deputy warden of Wilpena Pound, a dark and slender bouncer in faded blue jeans terminating in elastic-sided riding boots. She wore a wide-brimmed felt hat and a white, man-style shirt, and her forearms under the rolled sleeves of the shirt, her face under the shadow of the hat, were a golden brown. She wore no make-up, and she didn't need it. Her cheeks were touched with pink up near the high cheekbones, her soft, curved lips were warmly red. But her dark eyes, that should have been large and soft in concert with the rest, were watchful and a little hostile. He wondered if she recognised him. He hoped not.

He had met her once before, twelve months back, and he

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didn't want to reminisce, even casually, about people and places, to explain how he came to be illegally in the Pound, to talk about anything at all. Her name was Anne, and she had served him groceries in the chalet store.

He doubted that she would recall him; he had been one of scores camped in the caravan park half a mile away through the gums. And their meeting had been too brief and ordinary, although not entirely so for him. It came back to him clearly now; her quick, warm smile, her knowledgeable interest in the paintings he had carried. But even that was no reason to expect her to remember, for artists in the district were commonplace. It was painting country.

"All right," he said evenly. "So you're the law. I haven't got a camping permit. Can you give me one?"

"No," she said. "You'll have to leave."

"You *do* give permits, though."

She leaned forward a little and eased herself in the saddle, as though wanting to count ten before replying. "We give them for special cases, not to greenhorns. We don't want everything destroyed by bushfires."

"I'm no greenhorn," Kingston said.

"No?" She rummaged her eyes slowly around his camp, itemising the new one-man tent, the new blankets hanging out to air, the sprawled remains of his breakfast fire. "If you weren't a greenhorn I wouldn't be here," she said. "Your smoke was visible for miles. Only a greenhorn lights a fire that big to cook a meal." She turned her gaze on him, level and disconcertingly direct. "Furthermore," she said, "you know that camping's not allowed—otherwise you'd not have sneaked in. You didn't come through the gorge."

Kingston felt a frustrative anger building up inside him. Of course he was a greenhorn. What city-dweller wasn't? He was a successful commercial artist, had been for better than ten years, and practised in the medium-sized, well-ordered, and respectable city of Adelaide, three hundred miles to the south. And he knew from the earlier visit that there was no camping in the Pound, except for special cases, like geologists in love with the ancient rock formations, or anthropologists sniffing among the cliff drawings of vanished aborigines. He knew that and had been trying to run a bluff in the hope that luck might swing his way.

The Pound's six square miles of gums and native pines, of sweet, sun-kissed bushland, were preserved as a national park. It had to remain unspoilt. No roads led into it. Only hikers and horse-trekkers were allowed.

And when the shock had come, after the accident, wounded

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instinct told him this was the place to be alone to paint and think about himself, what he had done and where he was going, to catch up and bind those tangled threads of nerves that had been threatening to pull him apart. This was the only place where he might find some form of therapy for what his physician had called his "guilt complex, exaggerated by overwork."

So, four days ago, he had driven his car deep into the scrub on the outside slopes of the northern ramparts of the Pound, climbed in over a saddle, and set up his painting camp here where the creek was farthest from the hiking and horse riding pads, where he had thought to remain undisturbed. Thus far the pervading peace had served only to accentuate his own turmoil. But he wanted to give it time. He had to. And now this girl was trying to throw him out. He looked up and she was examining the landscape, half finished on its easel. Her expression was of curious speculation.

"So it's no good," he said harshly. "You don't have to tell me."

"Your painting," she said. "Your business." She tightened rein and backed her horse in a movement of departure. "You've got two choices." Her voice was cool and steady, and her dark eyes had turned on him the same curious speculation they had formerly applied to his landscape. "You can climb out over that saddle where you obviously sneaked in. Or you can live at the chalet like everyone else. You can paint from there . . . others do—come in here every day."

Kingston took out a packet of cigarettes. He noticed that his fingers were not quite steady with the match. The tremor came from deep within him. He could not go to the chalet and live amid the multi-cackle of its eager holidaymakers, well-intentioned, voluble, and fiercely intent on the enjoyment of each wild flower, each kangaroo, each wallaby, each single blade of grass, each other. He couldn't do it. He dared not leave the Pound. He debated for a long-drawn moment whether he should not disclose himself, pour out the torrent of his trouble, and hope that she would understand. But he couldn't do that, either. He couldn't beg.

He turned back to her with nothing solved, except that he was not going to leave as long as subterfuge might cover him. His face was ridged under the red tinge of sunburn it had so recently acquired. His hands were sweating at the palms.

"I don't want to be with people," he said tightly, biting the words off. "I want quietness." He waved a hand around the camp. "I want this."

She examined him closely for a moment. "We've got cabins.

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There's one empty, well away from the chalet. You can have that!"

"I don't want it. I want this."

She shook her head. "It's that, or nothing."

"Nothing then," he said harshly. "I'll leave."

"Do that," she said calmly. "I'll check to see you make it."

Standing back from the escarpment, Kingston was having trouble with his colours. Earlier, it had been his brushstrokes that were too heavy; now it was his colours, too. They had turned dull and flat. He lifted the brush with a quick, tense movement, fingers straining on the handle, and for a moment he was near to throwing it into space over the escarpment's edge. Then he forced control on himself, placed the brush carefully on the easel's ledge, and chided himself aloud with mocking bitterness.

"You poor damn fool," he said. "You never were good enough to capture anything like this, or get within a mile of it."

But he was bluffing, and his deeper, hidden self was aware of it. Only three months ago, a day away from the office drawing board and he could absorb the fresh vibrancy of life and translate it into living colour. Not expertly enough for national galleries, perhaps, but good enough to satisfy himself; the way an amateur pianist could say of himself, Well, it's not Rubinstein, but it's good, it's satisfying, it's part of me. Three months ago.

Dear God, he thought. Three months ago I hadn't killed a girl.

Three months ago Dick Kingston had taken the girl, Barbara Saunders, to a late-night show. She was a girl of whom he had been more than fond, maybe loved, although he wasn't sure; blonde, slim, and vivaciously intense. She lived in the hills just out of town; the night was slashed with rain. Kingston drove carefully to take her home, but it didn't help. A car came screeching round a bend, far out on its wrong side.

He swung his wheel over in a split-second's thinking, hoping to take the empty side when, by some miracle, the other driver managed to swing back. He smashed right through the passenger door. Barbara Saunders was dead, hideously, pitifully dead, when the locked cars shuddered to a stop.

Kingston sat down on a rock now and lit a cigarette. This was the trouble with his painting—and with him. It was what had driven him up here away from the city as, day by day, the weight of self-accusation had grown heavier. If he had not swung his car, but had stayed on his correct side of the road, Barbara Saunders would never have been killed. The police

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inquiry had acquitted him of blame, but his wrong decision was a torture in the mind. Her life was on his conscience. It didn't change anything that his doctor had argued that overwork had made him vulnerable and unable to reason properly. This thing was in his mind, whatever its condition.

He threw down the cigarette, unfinished, and ground it beneath a twisting heel. He shook his head slowly, half-heartedly trying to clear it of visions that he knew would not so easily go away. It was more a mannerism than an attempt. The blue-eyed, fairhaired prettiness of Barbara Saunders, alive, was floating like a nightmare somewhere behind his eyes. He could not leave the Pound until it had been erased or, at least, dimmed sufficiently to live with. And that reaffirmation jerked his mind back to the girl and the man who were searching for him below.

He had been confident that the girl would not find him again; but the man had raised a doubt. He feared the man, yet right from the first it had been too late to do anything. He had pitched his camp up here, and here it had to stay. He could not hope to elude them or, even more important, himself, by playing catch-as-catch-can through the scrub. Either they missed him and he was left in peace or they found him—and who knew what would happen then?

He had done all he could to hide his tracks. He had walked two miles towards the saddle, choosing the softest ground and packing a full load to make the prints look right. Then he had swung in a big, hard-ground circle to intercept the creek, and walked in its water for nearly a mile before climbing out on rock.

He gave a small, wry grin. Any city slicker, any greenhorn with a television set could learn the tricks these days. He had a chance, bare, slender, but a chance, that they would think he had hauled himself out over the saddle.

Then a dry cough spun him round, like a bullet through the shoulder. A tall thin man was standing ten yards away, at the treeline, where the earth stopped and the escarpment's rock platform began. He was dressed in khaki working clothes. A rifle dangled easily in his right hand.

"Surprised?" he said. "Have I spoilt the view?"

Kingston stared at him, not so much surprised as shocked. His eyes, almost of their own accord, probed slowly around the trees and low bushes of the scrub, looking for Anne Stewart. There was no sign of her and he felt a flicker of disappointment. He turned back to the man, and there was a twist of mockery in the long, lined face, and in the dark eyes that watched so carefully from under the ambush of thick, white brows.

"I sent her the long way round," the man said to him evenly.

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"With the horses. I wanted a few words with you . . . alone."

Kingston nodded dully. "You didn't see my tracks, leading towards the saddle?"

"Yeah. But we saw you on the skyline first." The man pushed back his hat to disclose a shock of white hair, matching the eyebrows but contrasting vividly with the sun-leathered darkness of his face. "You ought to keep off skylines. This one in particular. That rock's rotten." He jerked his head. "Better come in off it. Not too close, though." He lifted the rifle slightly. "Six feet's near enough."

"You're Alex Stewart," Kingston said.

"Yeah." Stewart carefully leaned his back against a tree. "And you? Smith? Jones?"

Kingston found himself a tree six feet away, but did not lean against it. He was too conscious of the hostility in Alex Stewart. He was too taut and strained.

"Kingston," he said flatly. "Dick Kingston. What d'you want to talk about?"

"I'll make it short," Stewart said. "I don't know what cock-and-bull story you told my daughter, but it doesn't wash with me."

"I told her nothing," Kingston said.

"Sensitive young artist in trouble." Stewart cocked a grizzled eyebrow. "That jog your memory?"

"I told her nothing," Kingston said again.

"All right, have it your way," Stewart said. "She worked it all out for herself, then. You stayed at the caravan park a year ago, she told me—and your painting was wonderful." His dark eyes flicked across to the landscape with its marks of coloured frenzy, perched like a derelict on its easel. "Well, I see what she means. It's lousy now."

Kingston's grey eyes blazed. "You were going to make it short."

"Here it is, then," Stewart said. "Anne says you're in trouble. I believe it, but not the way she does. You sneaked in here and tried to hide. I guess I know that sort of trouble."

Kingston had a crazy urge to laugh at the deadly seriousness of this tall man with the determined mouth and the face that could have been good-humoured once—say, half an hour ago. But it wasn't funny. Stewart was the warden and he was going to exercise his powers.

Suddenly the whole truth struck Kingston like a blow. This was the end of his sojourn in the Pound. This was where his quest for peace of mind had to begin all over again. Desperation rose to strangle him. He looked past the lonely easel, through the

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blue veil that was now dropping on the air, softening the far side mountain wall and its "crooked finger" peaks. The view, beautiful beyond measure, stirred him to the point of violence.

Then he heard the faint clink of metal striking stone. Anne Stewart was coming with the horses.

"You want me out," he said harshly. "I'll go."

"You're damn right you'll go," Stewart said. "But not out over the saddle. You're coming in with me—to the chalet." He straightened from the tree. "And I'm going to hold you there until the police arrive. We'll see about this trouble you're so keen to hide."

Something exploded in Kingston's mind then. Pieces of a broken montage whirled about it with a fearful clarity . . . himself being marched into the chalet at rifle-point before crowds of gaping tourists, bristling with cameras and abuzz with words . . . being held until a policeman came in his jeep, jetted by a dust stream all the forty miles from Hawker . . . questions . . . questions . . . explanations. The nightmare of a nightmare.

Then he found himself standing perfectly still, isolated in some mental vacuum, looking out at Alex Stewart . . . not hating him, because he was only doing his warden's duty as he saw it, but resolved to call his bluff, and, if it were more than bluff, to call that too.

The noise of horses floated in on him, diverse with closeness now, the clink of hoofs on stones, the creak of leather, the occasional snuffling breath. He turned slowly to see Anne Stewart threading through the trees from farther along the escarpment, leading three horses. She was dressed as she had been that other day, in jeans and a white shirt. She was breathing deeply from the climb, he could see the quick rise and fall of her bosom under the shirt, and her face was flushed.

She was looking at him gravely, but without any sign of the earlier hostility. He could see it as clearly as though she were inches close, and she was still a hundred yards away. He felt a communication of understanding, and, for the first time, realised the purport of her father's words . . .

Anne Stewart, having recognised him, had guessed that the trouble was within himself, and not some blatant outwardness, some infraction of the law. She was on his side.

He turned back to Alex Stewart, tense and angry, yet with a twist of bitter irony on his mouth. Anne Stewart's intuitive understanding had obviously inspired her father's distrust. Perhaps if she had reported him merely as a trespasser it would not have come to this.

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" I'm not going anywhere with you, Stewart," he said flatly. " I'm walking out my own way . . . I'm going now."

Stewart's dark eyes narrowed slightly. The rifle lifted. " You're going out with me."

Kingston swung away and started along the rock platform of the escarpment, towards Anne Stewart, wanting to voice some word of thanks before heading for the saddle. She was close now, leading her horses through a tongue of trees that thrust out nearly to the escarpment's edge. He walked watching her, his feet stumbling on the rough rock surface, no longer conscious of the rifle at his back—until Stewart's voice cut in.

" Hold it, Kingston." Then, harsher, louder, " Hold it, Kingston. In the name of the law . . . I'll put one through your leg."

Kingston saw Anne Stewart's dark eyes suddenly widen and her mouth open. " Father. No." Her voice was high. Sharp-edged.

She broke into a run, right arm dragged back as she tugged the horses from their walk, bursting out of the hampering trees and on to the rock platform with a clatter of steel hoofs . . . And at that moment, as the strike of hoofs rang out and the weight bore down, Kingston felt a clutch of terror. The rock moved. A slip. A jolt.

" Anne," he shouted. " Get back . . . back to the trees."

She swung round, hauling at the horses, rearing with fright now, hoofs pounding. Then, suddenly, their section of rock seemed to bend, stood on its nose, and slid downwards with a thunderous, grating noise. It happened so quickly, Kingston had no time to move. The high, piercing scream of horses split his ears, his senses.

He started towards the dust cloud spurting up from the slide when the ground beneath him gave another slip and jolt. He leapt for the solid earth of the trees, reached them and, not halting, ran towards where Anne Stewart had disappeared.

He dropped to hands and knees and crawled towards the edge, carrying a terrible fear of what he might find when he looked down through the dust. He had to force himself to crane out, and when he did a deep, sucking breath gagged in him. He held it and exhaled slowly.

Anne Stewart was lying motionless on a rock ledge some twenty yards below. The noise of the slide still echoed up the escarpment face, a dull, rattling roar growing ever fainter in the distance. There was no sign of the horses.

" God," a voice breathed at his side. A voice he didn't recognise. " Oh, God."

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Kingston slid back and stood up, his body motionless, and each muscle, nerve, and sinew strung to concert pitch. He looked down at the crouched figure of Alex Stewart and the three-word prayer that Stewart had uttered came up out of his heart, too.

He was afraid of what he had seen over the brink of the escarpment—the great, plunging drop into the Pound floor where the horses had gone, and the crumpled figure of Anne Stewart dumped by some miracle upon a narrow ledge that ran like a collar along the grim, battered face of rock. He was afraid because he did not know whether she was alive or dead, and because he knew that if alive she was only perilously so.

He was afraid too, because she was a badly injured girl who reminded him, horrifyingly, of another who had lain crushed and lifeless on the plush upholstery of his car, and had ever since walked his thoughts. Was it all to happen again? Was this girl also to die through his unwitting fault? He fought against the thought with all the moral strength that he could summon. It was unthinkable; and yet so close.

"You. Kingston." Alex Stewart's voice was hoarse. "Get back to the chalet. Bring ropes and tackle . . . Go." His voice rose to a broken shout. "Go. I've got to get down to her. Stay there. If she wakes she might try to move, and fall."

Kingston looked up into fear-dilated eyes, a foot or closer to his face. And the near-panic that was in them, the stark contrast with the other Stewart who had been so calm and masterful, somehow helped him grapple with his own obsessive fears. He glanced away to the broken rock of the escarpment, still thinly wreathed in dust, and discovered in himself a calm incisiveness of mind.

He knew exactly then what he was going to do. What he had to do. He was going to climb down to Anne Stewart and let her father go for help. It was commonsense—her father knew the country, the paths, the short cuts. And it was even more. In that instant before the slide had taken her away, he had felt emotion for her, an attunement . . . It made her now his special care. Besides, he sensed without understanding it, that this was his challenge, too.

"Stewart," he said tersely. "Listen. I'll climb down and stay with her. You go for help. You know the country, the shortest way." He sliced air with a cutting hand. "It doesn't matter who stays. It matters a lot how soon we get help. We don't know how badly hurt she is."

"Can you climb?" Alex Stewart's tone was almost querulous.

"Well enough," Kingston snapped.

Stewart stared at him uncertainly. Then he gathered his wits.

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He nodded. "You're right. Let's go."

They scouted along the edge of the escarpment, past the glaring new scar of the landslip, and found a place that went down less than vertically to the ledge, that offered small footholds of jutting, weathered rock and, wondrously, a few tough, scrubby bushes.

Cold fear fingered up and down Kingston's spine and settled in his stomach. A spurt of sweat leapt from his armpits to trickle down his sides. He hesitated a moment on the edge, but there was an even greater fear in not going down. He lay flat on his stomach and slowly swung his legs out into space, sought for and found the first foothold, and then it was too late to do or think of anything but getting safely to the ledge.

"Good luck," Alex Stewart said. "I'll wait to see you down."

Kingston tested each foothold carefully, applying the pressure of one foot only, before trusting it with all his weight. He had seen climbers doing this in films, but he didn't think about it now. He performed the vital ritual by instinct. He tested the strengths of the handhold bushes, too, pulling them with gradually increasing force. It was slow progress, but it was the best that he could do.

He felt, in all that immensity of rock wall and blue-hazed space, like a clumsy fly, or a blind ant on a heap of gravel. He didn't dare look down. He felt for everything with feet and hands, hugging the bare, abrasive rock as though, by doing so, he might adhere.

Then he heard a faint, strangled cry below and to the right. Something between a sob and an incoherent question. He looked down for the first time, quickly, to see Anne Stewart up on one knee and trying to gain her feet. She was swaying. The steep scar blaze of the landslip was at her back. In front of her, no more than four feet away, the ledge ended on the brink of space.

Kingston felt something stab up through him. Flaring. Searing. And then he jumped.

The drop was better than six feet and he staggered when he hit, stumbled, and fell sideways. He scrambled to his feet and ran for her, his left shoulder brushing the rock and the right one pushing air. He had no thoughts, no awareness, of anything but the girl. She was standing now, dazed and bewildered. He reached her, grabbed her round the waist and held her tightly.

"Anne," he said fiercely. "Anne. Don't struggle."

She didn't look at him. She tried to wriggle free. He drew back his right fist. "Keep still," he shouted. "Quit it, or I'll knock you out."

She relaxed. The command, the threat, the cutting urgency

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of voice, or, maybe, even the gain in time, had broken through the skin of semi-consciousness that still contained her.

Kingston lowered her until she was sitting with her back against the rock wall. Her face was scratched, and a big blue-green bruise was lumped up just below the left eye. There was freshly dried blood on her forehead and down one cheek, come from a scalp wound still oozing slowly. Her left arm, cradled on her lap, was obviously broken below the elbow. Kingston went over her with gentle fingers, feeling for other breaks, and found none.

"How bad is it?" she whispered.

He looked up sharply, and her eyes were clear, watching him quite calmly. He didn't answer immediately because a strange sensation, part wonderment, had flashed on him. For a revealing moment she looked like blonde Barbara Saunders—the messed hair, the blood streaked on her face, the broken, useless arm . . . Then the illusion passed. The wraith image was forced out by the dark hair and dark eyes of a girl who was very much alive.

"You were lucky," Kingston said unevenly. "A broken arm, a scratch or two, but nothing else." He forced a grin, for reassurance sake, for both of them. Then he looked up to Alex Stewart, a wedge of anxious face thrust out above them. "O.K.," he shouted. "Left arm broken. Nothing else."

Alex Stewart's face cracked a grin. "Stay where you are," he yelled. "Don't go away."

Then his head withdrew and Kingston grinned, too, out into the great emptiness before them that was not really empty to anyone with eyes and soul to see, but crammed with beauty and the richness of it. There was no sign there of Barbara Saunders any more, and he understood the challenge that he had answered and not understood before. Barbara Saunders had disappeared, been expiated, in Anne Stewart. One death, one life—and life was stronger. It more than balanced out.

He tilted his head and looked up at the cliff, its broken rim dramatic now against the pale blue sky, and a thin cloud pink as a flamingo's wing. This was where she had fallen down and he had climbed to save her. This was the wall of fate. But he had no fear of its dangers now; only a warmth of gratitude. He had won his peace on its rugged, treacherous slope. He smiled inwardly at the oddity of it. He had sought therapy in the peaceful detachment of painting in the Pound, and found his cure in terror on a cliff face. He reached out and touched Anne's shoulder. "That cabin you offered me . . ."

"Gone," she said. "There's a room at the chalet, though."

"I'll take it," Kingston said, and slid an arm round her waist,

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ostensibly to help her feel secure. He settled his back against the sun-warmed rock. " Maybe I can teach the deputy warden how to paint."

She smiled into his face, through the dirt and pain, and the smile's depth told him she had realised a fresh start had been made. " My bad luck," she said, and glanced down at her arm. " I'm left-handed."

Kingston grinned. " I'll wait."

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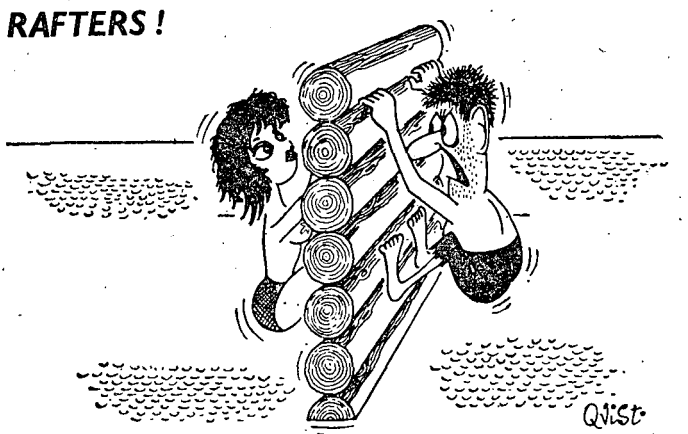

" It would be so much easier if you weren't so damned shy! "

" Don't lean so heavily on your end. Watch out for that big wave. Keep clear of that school of fish just ahead . . . "

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MAN'S WORLD

By BRIAN FRIEL

I HAD five maiden aunts and they doted on me. I was their only nephew, the child of their youngest sister Christina, who alone of the whole family of twelve left home while she was still in her teens to work in the nearest town of Strabane and married a town man. The others stayed together, grew into men and women, buried Grandfather and Grandmother—whom I never knew—and the six brothers—whom I never knew either—who must have died long before their time.

When I first became aware of them, they were settled women whose ages ranged from about forty-five to fifty, each with her role in the running of their doll's house. Aunt Kate and Aunt Maggie were the breadwinners, teachers in the village school; Aunt Agnes was the housekeeper; Aunt Sarah looked after the cow and the chickens and the precise garden; and Aunt Rose—well, as the others used to say with gentle tolerance, "Rose will always be Rose." That was good enough for me.

Every year on the first of August, we went to Donegal to visit them. The journey itself was an adventure in a mad scarlet rail-bus which plunged along a narrow-gauge track pulling a dancing wagon of luggage behind it and emitted a throaty toot-toot now and again just for the sheer joy of it. It was a two and a half hour trip through hills and between mountains, past lakes and streams, between high banks glowing with sun-yellow whins and flat boglands of purple and brown and russet. Inside the bus, country women, anonymous in black headshawls, and great unshaven countrymen chatted volubly to one another and the atmosphere took body with the pungent smoke of their pipes. Then at the end of the line, run to earth at the foot of grey mountains, the village of Ardara itself, a hamlet of about five

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Brian Friel is thirty-two, married, has two daughters; his short stories have appeared on both sides of the Atlantic. Since he took up full-time writing he finds that his output has not increased but the amount of time he spends fishing in Donegal has.

Among his possessions are, he says, a motorbike, a poor memory, a Lakeland terrier, an unusual capacity—but not the self-discipline—for hard work, and a day-long passion for all the varieties of cheap sweets that his daughters eat only before meals.

hundred people. The line stopped abruptly half a mile short of the village although why, after battling across impossible terrain for the previous sixty miles, it could not tackle the last soggy stretch used to puzzle me. But that was its unpredictable way and we had no reason to complain, because Mother's home was only a stone's throw away from the terminus.

For days before we left home, Father would be quiet and moody, and I never remember a holiday that was not overshadowed by his cold withdrawal from our enthusiastic preparations. But once we were on our way he thawed slowly, partly because of the whisky flask he carried in his hip pocket and partly because of Mother's watchful attentions to him. So that by the time the rail-bus stuttered to a halt, he had arrived at a state of garrulous good humour. And there on the platform would be the five aunts, smiling, happy, nervous, welcoming, one or two of them very often in slippers and aprons if the rail-bus caught them unawares, bobbing up and down in the golden heat of an August afternoon.

Of course I got their first attention. Invariably I had got bigger and fatter and healthier and more manly and cleverer—that on a second's observation—and before we had left the station, but not before I had been handled by each aunt in turn, it was unanimous that I was " more a caution than ever."

Mother came next. Less said now, but five pairs of eyes quickly noted the shoulders gathering flesh and the new line at the edge of the mouth, and there were tentative, casual-sounding questions about how she was eating and sleeping.

Lastly Father. They did love him, I believe now, because he was Christina's husband and father of her child. But he was a man—more, a town man—and since they had no experience of men, they had nothing spontaneous to say to him and had to improvise with formalities. To tide the situation over, Father usually busied himself by passing me from one to the other.

The first few days of the holiday were never enjoyable: I had

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to go over every song and recitation and mime and imitation that I had done in previous summers—every detail had to be perfect too—and then bring them up to date with the latest additions to my repertoire, not once but half a dozen times until Aunt Sarah or Aunt Agnes would insist that the others were tiring me and Aunt Kate and Aunt Maggie would finally agree to release me.

If I were singing, Mother would accompany me on the yellow-keyed piano, half of whose notes were mute, and her eyes would rove restlessly round the five naked faces, smiling brightly if a sister's eyes met hers or just moving from one to the other as if she were somehow playing them and not the piano. At last I would be set free, out to the fields and the Atlantic wind and to Aunt Rose.

It was always a relief to get away from them, and yet when I would run round to the back of the house and stand looking across the valley towards the hazel wood where the witch with the red eyes lived, I was neither surprised nor disappointed to find Aunt Rose there before me, waiting for me.

I know now, after almost thirty years, that she was a plain-looking woman. Her face was too white, her cheeks too flat, her mouth permanently open, her head shot forward. But at five or six years of age, I saw only a mild woman who always smiled and seldom spoke and knew exactly what would delight a boy of my age.

There would be a black rabbit in the warren or a pigeon's nest in the wood or a hedgehog along the path beside the burn or a rose tree, sudden and inexplicable, in the lower meadow. Or she had spotted an early crop of nuts and had guarded it for me by her silence. Or she had a sick hen in the byre with a ludicrous bandage of cottonwool tied round its head, or a trunkful of mysteries sent home from Kenya by some grand-uncle who had a wandering foot.

And all these things she would reveal to me, not exultantly but almost coyly like a fresh girl wooing her first youth. Unless we were far out of earshot of the house, away beyond the hazel wood for example, where the boglands stretched out before us and we had to raise our voices to be heard above the wind or in the sweet-smelling secrecy of the byre where a whisper would do: in those places she talked, wildly, carelessly, senselessly it seemed to me a lot of the time, telling me about Grandfather and Grandmother and about her schooldays and about a necklace she once bought with egg money and about a fortune-teller who promised great things for her.

Sometimes, too, Aunt Rose would talk about her brothers. I was too young to invest their unexplained passing with mystery

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and too incurious to ask questions about them. I knew only the details Aunt Kate or Aunt Maggie had volunteered—that the family had stopped keeping bees when Uncle John died or that the good bedroom could not be used for displaying Mother's wedding gifts because Uncle Joe was lying there in his last illness. So that I had accepted these men as shadowy backgrounds to memorable events in the family. But Aunt Rose talked about them, giving them girth and height and colouring, made me laugh at Uncle Peter's attempt to train a sheepdog or Uncle Pat's efforts at changing the course of the burn.

When she and I got back to the house again, we would find Mother and the other four basking in the sun at the gable. Aunt Kate would say, " And where has Rose been hiding our young man? Eh? Keeping him to herself, I'll bet. Aye, Rose is a deep one." And there would be a sympathetic laugh.

Father spent most of his day in the village. After a late breakfast, he would say, " I think I'll go out and stretch my legs and leave you women to your gossiping."

We would not see him again until lunchtime when he would sit at the head of the table and make jokes about men in the village who, he said, had asked him to " put in a good word with the girls." Mother would tell him sharply to shut up. But he would persist.

With the best of good humour, he would point out the many advantages of a match between Aunt Maggie, for example, and Jimmy the Post who owned one of the best-cared-for farms in the locality. " It's a proposition," he would say, slapping the table with his fingertips. " Turn it over. Give it a thought."

Occasionally when he continued his schemes after lunch, Mother would accuse him of being drunk. He would then go sullenly to bed for the remainder of the afternoon and a silence would fall on the house. Only Aunt Rose seemed to be unaware of the undercurrents which even I was beginning to understand.

On the eve of my eighth birthday, Father was sacked from his job in the Civil Service. His Christmas binge had extended too far into January and his superiors had no patience left. However, as a return for twenty years' service, they promised him the first offer of any substitute work which might arise during the year.

When our meagre savings were exhausted three weeks after Father's dismissal, there was nothing for us but appeal to the aunts. Mother wrote to them and by return post came an enthusiastic invitation to us to come and stay as long as we wished.

The following afternoon we set off.

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Never before had I travelled to Ardara in the winter and the journey was a series of disappointments. Darkness caught up with us before we were halfway and snow began to fall. The red rail-bus was cold and feebly lit and the other passengers hugged themselves in silence in scattered seats. A cattle dealer behind me smoked a dirty clay pipe whose fumes sickened me. Mother sat upright beside me, her hands up her sleeves, hissing a rosary to herself, and Father slept heavily somewhere at the rear. Only the happiness that I knew lay ahead kept me from whining.

The five aunts were on the platform to meet us and everything was suddenly right again. They were friendlier than ever and even more talkative. Although it was only five months since they had last seen me, they agreed that I had got bigger and firmer; and when they hugged me in turn, each of them held on to me protectively for a second longer than usual. Indeed they scarcely looked at Mother at all, so concentrated were they on me.

But to Father they were as welcoming and as polite as ever. They told him he was looking very well and said that January was a good time for a rest. All bundled together, all talking at the same time, the eight of us walked the short distance to the house.

That night and for the next three days, snow kept falling. Gradually paths, roadways, hedges became one. The village school was closed and Aunt Kate and Aunt Maggie were at home all day. Only Father ventured out, beating an unsteady path for himself to the town.

In the house, talk became thin. There would be hours of quiet and then from upstairs would come the sharp voices raised in anger of two of the aunts. Sometimes they snapped at one another when we were all together, and on those occasions Mother would tell me to go to the sitting-room and "keep up with your lessons." I noticed that she had begun doing most of the heavy housework; never before had she been allowed to lift a finger.

Ardara was turning sour for me. I could not go outside because of the snowdrifts, and inside I was either forgotten about or the object of everybody's attention. Perhaps for a whole morning I would moon about, unseen, and then suddenly a couple of the women would decide that my education was being neglected. Aunt Kate and Mother would lead me to the sitting-room, set me between them, and begin teaching me.

These lessons frequently ended in tears. Aunt Kate would call me stubborn and obstinate and spoilt and Mother would defend me; or Aunt Kate would stump off in disgust and Mother would

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suddenly slap my cheeks with her open hand, something she used never to do.

To get away from them all, I would creep into Father's bed and lie beside him, warm and snoring. When he would awaken and dress himself fumblingly for the village, I would move into the part of the bed warmed by his body and wait until he came back again. Sometimes in his sleep he would throw his hand across my chest and I would lie motionless beneath it, admiring its roughness.

By the end of two weeks I knew I hated my five aunts, Rose especially because she had disappointed me the most. I had expected her to provide some entertainment, to have something of interest tucked away. But she had nothing; the snow had covered all her resources. Yet she kept haunting me.

Wherever I went in the small house, she followed me, watching me with her diluted blue eyes, her head shot forward, her mouth never closed, silent. When I would look back arrogantly at her, the flat cheeks would rise in a smile and her head would bob up and down in greeting but she had nothing to say. Even when I thought she was out in the byre or bringing in turf for the fire, I would discover her pale face pressed against the window, peering in at me.

I began to ignore her; but that made no difference. At last, in desperation one day, I called her "Cow face," the most hurtful nickname I could concoct, and that rid me of her. From then on, she stopped following me, but whenever we were together in the kitchen or the sitting-room, I could feel her eyes on me.

It was one of the railwaymen who found Father lying unconscious in a drift of snow at the side of the signalbox. He carried him on his shoulders to the house and then went for the doctor. I was in Father's bed, waiting for him to come back when the dark bulk of the two men passed the window. The house became suddenly quick with talk again. Mother was purposeful and competent and organised the aunts who were racing round in near hysteria. They laid him in his bed and loaded him with blankets.

His lips were blue, I remember, and one eye open and one shut in a grotesque wink. If he dies, I thought, I want to die too; I don't want to be the only man left in this house. Until the doctor came, hours later, Mother sat beside him, pouring drops of brandy into his mouth, rubbing his feet and legs and cheeks with her strong hands, talking to him with quiet intensity, calling him back to life.

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When the doctor arrived and I was chased out of the way, I went out to the byre to lie down and die too. Aunt Rose interrupted me. I should have locked the door from the inside.

"Is it you?" she said, peering into the dark corner where I lay on damp straw.

"Why?"

"I just thought it was you."

She came over to me and squatted down beside me. "What are you doing here?"

"Nothing."

"It's the snow," she said, half to herself. "The snow."

The cold was seeping through my clothes. My lips must be darkening by now.

"I'll take you over to the brook and show you McHugh's new lambs."

"No."

"We'll go to the village—no one will miss us now—and buy a poke of sweets."

"Go away."

"You never saw Uncle John's sun helmet. It's up in the loft. Come on up and we'll look at it."

"Go away. Go away." I closed one eye and waited for death to take me.

"I'll show you something," she said softly, "if you promise not to tell no one."

"I don't want to see anything any more."

"No one knows about this. No one in the whole world except me."

I sat up, interested. I could die later. "Tell me what it is first."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

She rose to her feet. Her face, now robbed of its perpetual smile, seemed strange, almost intelligent. She went over to the door and bolted it. Then her fingers groped along the lintel above the window, found a loose stone and removed it. From the hole she brought out a scrap of paper. I got up and stood behind her.

"There," she said. "Read that." It was a letter. Her hands were trembling.

The byre was dark and the handwriting spidery but I made it out. The letter was headed by an address in Boston and dated 1906:

Dear Rose, I have now made enough money for your passage. If you will come out and marry me, I will send it to you.

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Please make up your mind and reply by return.
In haste, Bill Sweeney

"Is that the whole surprise?" I asked, disappointed.

She took the letter from me, folded it, and put it back in its hiding-place.

"Bald Billy they called him," she said. "Because even then he hadn't a stab of hair on his head."

She drew back the bolt on the door and stood looking across the stunted hedge into the snow-covered meadow. The smile was creeping back into her face as she went out into the crisp air.

Father was out of his bed of pneumonia within a fortnight and well enough to accept a temporary post in early March. The fright did him good. We left Ardara when spring was imminent and as I sat waiting impatiently for the rail-bus to pull out of the station, the five faces of the aunts smiled and nodded in at us as if nothing had happened.

But I knew then that this was a man's world and I was determined to go camping with the boys next August. There was nothing to bring me back there any more, nothing to interest me, not even Aunt Rose.

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NEXT MONTH IN

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THE BEST SHORT STORIES

ON SALE 2/6
SEPTEMBER 8

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Beginning

FEAR IS THE KEY

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by
ALISTAIR MACLEAN

author of
The Guns of Navarone

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IF YOU could call a ten-by-six wooden box mounted on a four-wheel trailer an office, then I was sitting in my office. I'd been sitting there for four hours, the earphones were beginning to hurt and the darkness was coming in from the swamps and the sea. But if I had to sit there all night, then I was going to do just that: those earphones were the most important thing in the world. They were the only remaining contact between me and all the world held for me.

Peter should have been within radio range three hours ago. It was a long haul north from Barranquilla, but we'd made that haul a score of times before. Our three DCs were old but as mechanically perfect as unceasing care and meticulous attention could make them. Pete was a fine pilot, Barry a crack navigator, the West Caribbean forecast had been good, and it was far too early in the season for hurricanes.

There was no conceivable reason why they shouldn't have been on the air hours ago. As it was, they must have already passed the point of nearest approach and be drawing away to the north, towards Tampa, their destination.

Could they have disobeyed my instructions to make the long dog-leg by the Yucatan Strait and flown the direct route over Cuba instead? All sorts of unpleasant things could happen to planes flying over war-torn Cuba in those days. It seemed unlikely; and when I thought of the cargo they were carrying, it seemed impossible. Where any element of risk was concerned, Pete was even more cautious and far-seeing than myself.

Over in the corner of my office on wheels, a radio was playing softly. It was tuned in to some English-speaking station, and for the second time that evening some hill-billy guitar player was singing softly of the death of mother or wife or sweetheart, I wasn't sure which. "My red rose has turned to white," it was called. Red for life and white for death. Red and white—the colours of the three planes of our Trans-Carib Air Charter service. I was glad when the song stopped.

There was nothing much else in the office. A desk, two chairs, a filing cabinet, and the big R.C.A. receiver-transmitter powered by a heavy T.R.S. cable that ran through the hole in the door and snaked across the grass and mud and one corner of the tarmac to the main terminal buildings. And there was a mirror. Elizabeth had put that up the only time she'd ever been here, and I'd never got around to taking it down.

I looked in the mirror and that was a mistake. Black hair, black brows, dark blue eyes, and a white strained haggard face to remind me how desperately worried I was. As if I needed reminding. I looked away and stared out of the window.

That was hardly any better. The only advantage was that I could no longer see myself. I certainly couldn't see anything else.

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Even at the best of times there was little enough to see through that window, just the ten empty desolate miles of flat swampland stretching from the Stanley Field airport to Belize, but now that the Honduras rainy season had begun, only that morning, the tiny tidal waves of water rolling endlessly down the single sheet of glass and the torn and lowering and ragged hurrying clouds driving their slanting rain into the parched and steaming earth turned the world beyond the window into a grey and misty nothingness.

I tapped out our call sign. The same result as the last five hundred times I'd tapped it. Silence. I altered the waveband to check that reception was still O.K., heard a swift succession of voices, static, singing, music, and homed back on our own frequency again.

The most important flight the Trans-Carib Air Charter Co. had ever made, and I had to be stuck here in our tiny sub-office waiting endlessly for the spare carburettor that never came. And until I got it, that red-and-white DC parked not fifty yards away on the apron was about as useful to me right then as a pair of sunglasses.

They'd have got off from Barranquilla, I was certain of that. I'd had the first news three days ago, the day I'd arrived here, and the coded cable dated 1.5.58 had made no mention of any possible trouble. Everything highly secret, only three permanent civil servants knew anything about it, Lloyd's willing to carry the risk even though at one of the highest premiums ever. Even the news, received in a radio report, of an attempted coup d'état yesterday by pro-dictatorship elements to try to prevent the election of the Liberal Ileras hadn't concerned me too much, for although all military planes and internal services had been grounded, foreign airlines had been operating.

But I'd taken no chances. I'd cabled Pete to take Elizabeth and John with him. If the wrong elements did get in in tomorrow's election, and found out what we'd done, the Trans-Carib Air Charter Co. would be for the high jump. But fast. Besides, on the fabulous fee that was being offered for this one freight haul to Tampa . . .

The phones crackled in my ears. Static, weak, but bang on frequency. As if someone was trying to tune in. I fumbled for the volume switch, turned it to maximum, adjusted the band-switch a hairline on either side, and listened as I'd never listened before. But nothing. I eased off one of the earphones and reached for a packet of cigarettes.

The radio was still on. For the third time that evening, and less than fifteen minutes since I'd heard it last, someone was again singing " My red rose has turned to white."

I couldn't stand it any longer.

I tore off the phones, crossed to the radio, switched it off with a jerk that almost broke the knob, and reached for the bottle under my desk. I poured myself a stiff one, then replaced the headphones.

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"CQR calling CQS. CQR calling CQS. Can you hear me? Can you hear me? Over."

The whisky splashed across the desk, the glass fell and broke with a tinkling crash on the wooden floor as I grabbed for the transmitter switch and mouthpiece.

"CQS here, CQS here!" I shouted. "Peter, is that you, Pete? Over."

"Me. On course, on time. Sorry for the delay." The voice was faint and far away, but even the flat metallic tone of the speaker couldn't rob it of its tightness, its anger.

"I've been sitting here for hours." My own anger sounded through my relief, and I was no sooner conscious of it than ashamed of it. "What's gone wrong, Pete?"

"This has gone wrong. Some joker knew what we had aboard. Or maybe he just didn't like us. He put a squib behind the radio. The detonator went off, the primer went off, but the charge—gelignite or TNT or whatever—failed to explode. Almost wrecked the radio—luckily Barry was carrying a full box of spares. He's only just managed to fix it."

My face was wet and my hands were shaking. So, when I spoke again, was my voice.

"You mean someone planted a bomb? Someone tried to blow the crate apart?"

"Just that."

"Anyone—anyone hurt?" I dreaded the answer.

"Relax, brother. Only the radio."

"Thank God for that. Let's hope that's the end of it."

"Not to worry. Besides, we have a watchdog now. A U.S. Army Air Force plane has been with us for the past thirty minutes. Barranquilla must have radioed for an escort to see us in." Peter laughed dryly. "After all, the Americans have a fair interest in this cargo we have aboard."

"What kind of plane?" I was puzzled; it took a pretty good flier to move two or three hundred miles out into the Gulf of Mexico and pick up an incoming plane without any radio directional bearing. "Were you warned of this?"

"No. But not to worry—he's genuine, all right. We've just been talking to him. Knows all about us and our cargo. It's an old Mustang, fitted with long range tanks—a jet fighter couldn't stay up all this time."

"I see." That was me, worrying about nothing, as usual. "What's your course?"

"040 dead."

"Position?"

He said something which I couldn't catch. Reception was deteriorating, static increasing.

"Repeat, please?"

"Barry's just working it out. He's been too busy repairing the radio to navigate." A pause. "He says two minutes."

"Let me talk to Elizabeth."

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Another pause, then the voice that was more to me than all the world. "Hullo, darling. Sorry we've given you such a fright." That was Elizabeth. Sorry she'd given me a fright; never a word of herself.

"Are you all right? I mean, are you sure you're—"

"Of course." Her voice, too, was faint and far away, but the gaiety and the courage and the laughter would have come through to me had she been ten thousand miles away. "And we're almost there. I can see the lights of land ahead." A moment's silence, then very softly, the faintest whisper of sound, "I love you, darling."

"Truly?"

"Always, always, always."

I leaned back happily in my chair, relaxed and at ease at last, then jerked forward, on my feet, half crouched over the transmitter as there came a sudden exclamation from Elizabeth and then the harsh, urgent shout from Pete.

"He's diving on us! The bastard's diving on us and he's opened fire. All his guns! He's coming straight—"

The voice choked off in a bubbling, choking moan, a moan pierced and shattered by a high-pitched feminine cry of agony, and in the same instant of time there came to me the staccato thunderous crash of exploding cannon-shells that jarred the earphones on my head. Two seconds it lasted, if that. Then there was no more sound of gunfire, no more moaning, no more crying. Nothing.

Two seconds. Only two seconds. Two seconds to take from me all this life held dear for me, two seconds to leave me alone in an empty and desolate and meaningless world.

My red rose had turned to white.

I DON'T quite know what I had expected the man behind the raised mahogany desk to look like. Subconsciously, I suppose, I'd looked for him to match up with those misconceptions formed by a reading and film-going—in the far-off days when I had had time for such things—that had been as extensive as they had been hopelessly unselective. The only permissible variation in the appearances of county court judges in the south-eastern United States, I had come to believe, was in weight—some were dried up, lean, and stringy; others triple-jowled and built to match—but beyond that any departure from the norm was unthinkable.

Judge Mollison didn't match up with any of the specifications. He was young, clean-shaven, impeccably dressed in a well-cut light grey tropical worsted and an ultra-conservative tie. He looked benign, and wasn't; he looked intelligent, and was. He was highly intelligent and sharp as a needle. And he'd pinned me now with this sharp needle of his intelligence and was watching me

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wriggle with a disinterested expression that I didn't much care for.

"Come, come," he murmured gently. "We are waiting for an answer, Mr.—ah—Chrysler." He didn't actually say that he didn't believe that my name was Chrysler, but if any of the spectators on the court benches missed his meaning they should have stayed at home.

Certainly the bunch of round-eyed schoolgirls, courageously collecting credit marks for their civics course by venturing into this atmosphere of sin and vice and iniquity, didn't miss it; neither did the sad-eyed dark-blonde girl sitting quietly on the front bench; and even the big black ape-like character sitting three benches behind her seemed to get it. At least the broken nose beneath the negligible clearance between eyebrows and hairline seemed to twitch. Maybe it was just the flies. The courtroom was full of them. I thought sourly that if appearances were in any way a reflection of character he ought to be in the box while I was below watching him. I turned back to the judge.

"That's the third time you've had trouble in remembering my name, Judge," I said reproachfully. "By and by some of the more intelligent citizens listening here are going to catch on. You want to be more careful, my friend."

"I am not your friend." Judge Mollison's voice was precise and legal, and he sounded as if he meant it. "And this is not a trial. There are no jurors to influence. This is only a hearing, Mr.—ah—Chrysler."

"Chrysler. Not ah—Chrysler. But you're going to make damned certain that there will be a trial, aren't you, Judge?"

"You would be advised to mind both your language and your manners," the judge said sharply. "Once again, your passport. Where is it?"

"I don't know. Lost, I suppose."

"Where?"

"If I knew that it wouldn't be lost."

"We are aware of that," the judge said dryly. "But if we could localise the area we could notify the appropriate police stations where it might have been handed in. When did you first notice you no longer had your passport and where were you at the time?"

"Three days ago—and you know as well as I do where I was at the time. Sitting in the dining-room of the La Contessa Motel, eating my dinner and minding my own business when Wild Bill Hickock here and his posse jumped me." I gestured at the diminutive alpaca-coated sheriff sitting in a cane-bottomed chair in front of the judge's bench, and thought that there could be no height barrier for the law enforcement officers of Marble Springs: the sheriff and his elevator shoes together couldn't have topped five feet four.

I had hardly expected a Wild West lawman complete with Frontier Colt, but I had looked for something like either badge or gun. No badge, no gun. None that I could see. The only gun in sight in the courthouse was a short-barrelled Colt revolver stuck

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in the holster of the police officer who stood behind and a couple of feet to the right of me.

" They didn't jump you," Judge Mollison was saying patiently. " They were looking for a prisoner who had escaped from the nearby camp of one of our state convict road forces. Marble Springs is a small town and strangers easily identifiable. You are a stranger. It was natural—"

" Natural! " I interrupted. " Look, Judge, I've been talking to the gaoler. He says the convict escaped at six o'clock in the afternoon. The Lone Ranger here picks me up at eight. Was I supposed to have escaped, sawn off my irons, had a bath, shampoo, manicure, and shave, had a tailor measure and fit a suit for me, bought underclothes, shirt, and shoes—"

" Such things have happened before," the judge interrupted. " A desperate man, with a gun or club—"

" —and grown my hair three inches longer all in the space of two hours? " I finished.

" It was dark in there, Judge—" the sheriff began, but Mollison waved him to silence.

" You objected to being questioned and searched. Why? "

" As I said, I was minding my own business. I was in a respectable restaurant, giving offence to no one. And where I come from, a man doesn't require a permit to enable him to breathe and walk around."

" He doesn't here either," the judge said patiently. " All they wanted was a driving licence, insurance card, social-security card, old letters, any means of identification. You could have complied with their request."

" I was willing to."

" Then why this? " The judge nodded down at the sheriff.

I followed his glance. Even when I'd first seen him in La Contessa the sheriff had struck me as being something less than good-looking, and I had to admit that the large plasters on his forehead and across the corner of the mouth did nothing to improve him.

" What else do you expect? " I shrugged. " When big boys start playing games, little boys should stay at home with mother." The sheriff was halfway out of his seat, eyes narrowed, and ivory-knuckled fists gripping the cane arms of his chair, but the judge waved him back impatiently. " The two gorillas he had with him started roughing me up. It was self defence."

" If they assaulted you," the judge asked acidly, " how do you account for the fact that one of the officers is still in hospital with damaged knee ligaments, and the other has a fractured cheekbone, while you are still unmarked? "

" Out of training, Judge. The state of Florida should spend more money on teaching its law officers to look after themselves."

" Be silent! "

There was a brief interval while the judge seemed to be regaining control of himself, and I looked round the court again. The schoolgirls were still goggle-eyed, this beat anything they'd ever

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had in their civics classes before: the dark-blonde in the front seat was looking at me with a curious half-puzzled expression on her face, as if she were trying to work out something; behind her, his gaze lost in infinity, the man with the broken nose chewed on the stump of a dead cigar with machine-like regularity; the court reporter seemed asleep; the attendant at the door surveyed the scene with an Olympian detachment; beyond him, through the open door, I could see the harsh glare of the late afternoon sun on the dusty white street and beyond that again, glimpsed through a straggling grove of palmettos, the twinkling ripple of sunlight reflecting off the green water of the Gulf of Mexico . . .

The judge seemed to have recovered his composure.

" We have established," he said heavily, " that you are truculent, intransigent, insolent, and a man of violence. You also carry a gun—a small-bore Lilliput, I believe it is called. I could already commit you for contempt of court, for assaulting and obstructing constables of the law in the course of the performance of their duties, and for being in illegal possession of a lethal weapon. But I won't." He paused for a moment, then went on, " We will have much more serious charges to prefer against you."

The court reporter opened one eye for a moment, thought better of it, and appeared to go to sleep again. The man with the broken nose removed his cigar, examined it, replaced it, and resumed his methodical champing. I said nothing.

" Where were you before you came here? " the judge asked abruptly.

" St. Catherine."

" I didn't mean that, but—well, how did you arrive here from St. Catherine? "

" By car."

" Describe it—and the driver."

" Green saloon—sedan, you'd call it. Middle-aged businessman and his wife. He was grey, she was blonde."

" That's all you can remember? " Mollison asked politely.

" That's all."

" I suppose you realise that description would fit a million couples and their cars? "

" You know how it is." I shrugged. " When you're not expecting to be questioned on what you've seen, you don't bother—"

" Quite, quite." He could be very acid, this judge. " Car from another state, of course? "

" Yes. But not of course."

" Newly arrived in our country and already you know how to identify licence plates of—"

" He said he came from Philadelphia. I believe that's another state." The court reporter cleared his throat.

The judge quelled him with a cold stare, then turned back to me.

" And you came to St. Catherine from . . .? "

" Miami."

" Same car, of course? "

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" No. Bus."

The judge looked at the clerk of the court, who shook his head slightly, then turned back to me. His expression was less than friendly. " You're not only a fluent and barefaced liar, Chrysler—" he'd dropped the Mr. so I assumed the time for courtesies was past— " but a careless one. There's no bus service from Miami to St. Catherine. You stayed the previous night in Miami? "

I nodded.

" In an hotel," he went on. " But, of course, you will have forgotten the name of that hotel? "

" Well, as a matter of fact—"

" Spare us." The judge held up his hand. " Your effrontery passes all limits, and this court will no longer be trifled with. We have heard enough. Cars, buses, St. Catherine, hotels, Miami—lies, all lies. You've never been in Miami in your life. Why do you think we kept you on remand for three days? "

" You tell me," I encouraged him.

" I shall. To make extensive inquiries. We've checked with the immigration authorities and every airline flying into Miami. Your name wasn't on any passenger or aliens list, and no one answering to your description was seen that day. You would not be easily overlooked."

I knew what he meant, all right. I had the reddest hair and the blackest eyebrows I'd ever seen on anyone, and the combination was rather startling. I'd got used to it myself, but I had to admit it took a bit of getting used to. And when you added to that a permanent limp and a scar that ran from the corner of my right brow to the lobe of my right ear—well, when it came to identification, I was the answer to the policeman's prayer.

" As far as we can discover," the judge went on coldly, " you've spoken the truth once. Only once." He broke off to look at the youth who had just opened the door leading to some chambers in the rear, and lifted his eyebrows in fractional interrogation. No impatience, no irritation; all very calm.

" This has just come for you, sir," the boy said nervously. He showed an envelope. " Radio message. I thought—"

" Bring it here." The judge glanced at the envelope, nodded at no one in particular, then turned back to me.

" As I say, you told the truth just once. You said you had come here from Havana. You did indeed. You left this behind you there. In the police station where you were being held for interrogation and trial." He reached into a drawer and held up a small book, blue and gold and white. " Recognise it? "

" A British passport," I said calmly. " I haven't got telescopic eyes, but I assume that it must be mine otherwise you wouldn't be making such a song and dance about it. If you had it all the time, then why—? "

" We were merely trying to discover the degree of your mendacity, which is pretty well complete, and your trustworthiness, which does not appear to exist." He looked at me curiously.

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" Surely you must know what this means: if we have the passport, we have much else besides. You appear unmoved. You're a very cool customer, Chrysler, or very dangerous. Or can it be that you are just very stupid?

" Our cables to Havana have produced much more than this passport: they have produced much interesting information.

" Your name is not Chrysler, it's Ford. You have spent the past two and a half years in the West Indies, and are well known to the authorities in all of the principal islands."

" Fame, Judge. When you've as many friends—"

" Notoriety. Served three minor prison sentences in two years." Judge Mollison was skimming through a paper he had in his hand. " No known means of support except three months working as consultant to a Havana salvage and diving firm." He looked up at me. " And in what—ah—capacity did you serve this firm? "

" I told 'em how deep the water was."

He regarded me thoughtfully, then returned to his paper.

" Associate of criminals and smugglers," he went on. " Chiefly of criminals known to be engaged in the stealing and smuggling of precious stones and metal. Known to have fomented, or attempted to foment, labour troubles in Nassau and Manzanillo, for ends suspected to be other than political. Deported from San Juan, Haiti, and Venezuela. Declared persona non grata in Jamaica and refused landing permit in Nassau, Bahamas." He broke off and looked at me. " A British subject—and not even welcome in British territories."

" Sheer prejudice, Judge."

" You have, of course, made an illegal entry into the United States." Judge Mollison was a difficult man to knock off stride. " How, I don't pretend to know—it happens constantly in those parts. Probably by Key West and a landing at night somewhere between Port Charlotte and here. It doesn't matter. And so now, in addition to assaulting officers of the law and carrying a gun without declaring it or possessing a licence for it, you can be charged with illegal entry. A man with your record could collect a stiff sentence for those, Ford.

" However, you won't. Not here, at least. I have consulted with the state immigration authorities and they agree with me that what best meets the case is deportation. We want no part in the affairs of any person like you. We understand from the authorities that you broke custody while being held on a charge of inciting violence among dockworkers and on a further alleged charge of attempted shooting of the policeman who arrested you. Such offences carry heavy penalties.

" The first charge is not an extraditable offence and on the second we have had no demand from the competent authorities. However, as I say, we intend to work not under extradition laws but deportation laws—we're deporting you to Havana. The proper authorities will be there to meet your plane when it lands tomorrow."

I stood still and said nothing. The courtroom was very quiet.

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Presently I cleared my throat and said, "Judge, I think that's downright unkind of you."

"It depends on the point of view," he said indifferently. He rose to go, caught sight of the envelope the youth had brought in, and said, "No, wait a moment," and sat down again, slitting open the envelope. He smiled bleakly at me as he extracted the flimsy sheets of paper.

"We thought we would ask Interpol to find out what was known about you in your own country, although I hardly think now there will be any further useful information. We have all we want . . . No, no, I thought not, nothing fresh here, not known . . . no longer listed. Wait a minute, though!" The calm leisured voice rose to a sudden shout that brought the somnolent reporter jack-in-the-box bolt upright, and sent him scurrying after notebook and pen that had spilt over the floor. "Wait a minute!"

He turned back to the first page of the cable.

"37b, Rue Paul-Valery, Paris," he read rapidly. "Your request received, etc., etc. Regret inform you no criminal listed in rotary card index under name of John Chrysler. Could be any of four others under alias, but unlikely: identification impossible without cephalic index and fingerprints.

"Remarkable resemblance from your description to the late John Montague Talbot. Reasons for your request and demand for urgency unknown, but enclosed please find summarised copy of salient features of Talbot's life. Regret unable help you further.

"John Montague Talbot. Height five feet eleven inches, weight thirteen stone, deep red hair parted far over on left side, deep-blue eyes, heavy black brows, knife scar above right eye, aquiline nose, exceptionally even teeth. Carries left shoulder perceptibly higher than right owing to fairly severe limp."

The judge looked at me, and I looked out of the door. I had to admit the description was not at all bad.

"Date of birth unknown, probably early 1920s. Place of birth unknown. No record of war career. Graduated Manchester University 1948 with B.Sc. in engineering. Employed for three years by Siebe, Gorman and Co." He broke off, looked sharply at me. "Who are Siebe, Gorman and Co.?"

"Never heard of them."

"Of course not. But I have. Very well known European engineering firm specialising, among other things, in all types of diving equipment. Ties in rather neatly with your employment with a salvage and diving firm in Havana, doesn't it?" He obviously didn't expect an answer, for he carried on reading at once.

"Specialised in salvage and deep-water recovery. Left Siebe, Gorman, joined Dutch salvage firm from which dismissed after eighteen months following inquiries into whereabouts of two missing twenty-eight-pound ingots worth twenty thousand pounds salvaged by firm in Bombay Harbour from the wreck of the ammunition and treasure ship, *Fort Stikene*, which blew up there 14th April 1944.

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" Returned to England, joined Portsmouth salvage and diving firm, associated with Corners Moran, notorious jewel thief, during salvage work on the *Nantucket Light* which sank off the Lizard, June 1955, carrying valuable cargo diamonds from Amsterdam to New York. Salvaged jewels to the value of twenty-seven thousand pounds were found to be missing. Talbot and Moran traced to London, arrested, escaped from police van when Talbot shot police officer with small concealed automatic. Police officer subsequently died."

I was leaning forward now, my hands gripped tightly on the edge of the box. Every eye was on me, but I had eyes only for the judge. There wasn't a sound to be heard in that stuffy courtroom except the drowsy murmur of flies high up near the ceiling and the soft sighing of a big overhead fan.

" Talbot and Moran finally traced to riverside rubber warehouse." Judge Mollison was reading slowly now, almost haltingly, as if he had to take time to appreciate the significance of what he was saying. " Surrounded, ignored order to surrender. For two hours resisted all attempts by police armed with guns and tear-gas bombs to overcome them. Following explosion, entire warehouse swept by uncontrollable fire of great intensity. All exits guarded but no attempt at escape. Both men perished in fire. Twenty-four hours later firemen found no trace of Moran—believed to have been almost completely incinerated. Talbot's charred remains positively identified by ruby ring worn on left hand, brass buckles of shoes, and German 4.25 automatic he was known to carry."

The judge's voice trailed off and he sat in silence several moments. He looked at me wonderingly, as if unable to credit what he saw, blinked, then slowly swivelled his gaze until he was looking at the little man in the cane chair.

" A 4.25 mm. gun, Sheriff? Have you any idea—? "

" I have." The sheriff's face was cold and mean and hard and his voice exactly matched his expression. " What we call a .21 automatic, and as far as I know there's only one of that kind made—a German Lilliput."

" Which was what the prisoner was carrying when you arrested him." It was a statement, not a question. " And he's wearing a ruby ring on his left hand." The judge looked at me for a long long moment. You could see that disbelief was slowly giving way to inescapable conviction. " The leopard—the criminal leopard—never changes his spots. Wanted for murder, perhaps two murders: who knows what you did to your accomplice in that warehouse; it was his body they found, not yours? "

The court was hushed and shocked and still: a falling pin would have had the lot airborne.

" A cop-killer." The sheriff licked his lips, looked up at Mollison, and repeated the words in a whisper. " A cop-killer. He'll swing for that in England, won't he, Judge? "

The judge was on balance again.

" It's not within the jurisdiction of this court to—"

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"Water!" The voice was mine, and even to my own ears it sounded no more than a croak. I was bent far over the side of the box, swaying slightly, propped up by one hand while I mopped my face with a handkerchief held in the other. I'd had plenty of time to figure it out, and I think I looked the way I think I ought to have looked. At least, I hoped I did. "I—I think I'm going to pass out. Is there—is there no water?"

"Water?" The judge sounded half impatient, half sympathetic. "I'm afraid there's no—"

"Over there," I gasped. I waved weakly to a spot on the other side of the officer who was guarding me. "Please!"

The policeman turned away. I'd have been astonished if he hadn't, and as he turned I pivoted on both toes and brought my left arm whipping across just below waist level—three inches higher and that studded and heavily-brass-buckled belt he wore around his middle would have left me needing a new pair of knuckles. His explosive grunt of agony was still echoing through the shocked stillness of the courtroom when I spun him round as he started to fall, snatched the heavy Colt from his holster, and was waving it gently around the room even before the policeman had struck the side of the box and slid, gasping painfully for air, to the wooden floor.

I took in the whole scene with one swift sweeping glance. The man with the broken nose was staring at me with an expression as near amazement as his primitive features could register, his mouth fallen open, the mangled stub of his cigar clinging impossibly to the corner of his lower lip. The girl with the dark-blonde hair was bent forward, wide-eyed, her hand to her face, her thumb under her chin, and her forefinger crooked across her mouth. The judge was no longer a judge, he was a waxen effigy of himself, as motionless in his chair as if he had just come from the sculptor's hands.

The clerk, the reporter, the door attendant were as rigid as the judge, while the group of schoolgirls and the elderly spinster in charge were as goggle-eyed as ever, but the curiosity had gone from their faces and fear stepped in to take its place: the teenager nearest me had her eyebrows arched high up into her forehead, and her lips were trembling, she looked as if she were going to start weeping or screaming any moment I hoped vaguely that it wasn't going to be screaming, then an instant later I realised that it didn't matter for there was likely to be a great deal of noise in the very near future. The sheriff hadn't been so unarmed as I had supposed: he was reaching for his gun.

His draw was not quite the clean swift blurring action to which the cinema of my youth had accustomed me. The long flapping tails of his alpaca coat impeded his hand, and he was further hindered by the arm of his cane chair. Fully four seconds elapsed before he reached the butt of his gun.

"Don't do it, Sheriff!" I said quickly. "This cannon in my hand is pointing right at you."

But the little man's courage, or foolhardiness, seemed to be in

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inverse proportion to his size. You could tell by his eyes, by the lips ever so slightly drawn back over the tightly clamped tobacco-stained teeth, that there was going to be no stopping him. Except in the only possible way.

At the full stretch of my arm I raised the revolver until the barrel was level with my eyes—this business of Dead-eye Dan snap-shooting from the hip is strictly for the birds—and as the sheriff's hand came clear of the folds of his jacket I squeezed the trigger. The reverberating boom of that heavy Colt, magnified many times by the confining walls of that small courthouse, quite obliterated any other sound. Whether the sheriff cried out or the bullet struck his hand or the gun in his hand no one could say: all we could be sure of was what we saw, and that was the sheriff's right arm and whole right side jerking convulsively and the gun spinning backwards to land on a table inches from the notebook of the startled reporter.

Already my Colt was lined up on the man at the door.

"Come and join us, friend," I invited. "You look as if you might be having ideas about fetching help." I waited till he was halfway down the aisle, then whirled round quickly as I heard a scuffling noise behind me.

There had been no need for haste. The policeman was on his feet, but that was all that could be said for him. He was bent almost double, one hand clutching his midriff, the knuckles of the other all but brushing the floor; he was whooping violently, gasping for breath. Then he slowly straightened to a crouched stooping position, and there was no fear in his face, only hurt and anger and shame and a do-or-die determination.

"Call off your watchdog, Sheriff," I said curtly. "He's liable to get hurt real bad next time."

The sheriff glared at me venomously and spat out one single unprintable word. He was hunched in his chair, left hand tightly gripping his right wrist; he gave every impression of a man too preoccupied with his own hurt to worry about any damage to others.

"Give me that gun!" the policeman demanded hoarsely. His throat seemed to be constricted, he had difficulty in forcing out even those few words. He had taken one lurching step forward and was no more than six feet away. He was only a kid, hardly a day over twenty-one.

"Judge!" I said urgently.

"Don't do it, Donnelly!" Judge Mollison had shaken off the first numbing shock. "Don't do it! That man's a killer. He's got nothing to lose by killing again. Stay where you are."

"Give me that gun." Judge Mollison might have been talking to himself for all the effect his words had had. Donnelly's voice was wooden, unemotional, the voice of a man whose decision lies so far behind him that it is no longer a decision but the sole obsessive reason for his existence.

"Stay where you are, sonny," I said quietly. "As the judge said,

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I have nothing to lose. Take another step forward and I'm going to shoot you in the thigh. Have you any idea what a soft-nosed low-velocity lead bullet does, Donnelly? If it gets your thighbone, it'll smash it so badly that you'll be like me and walk with a limp for the rest of your life. If it gets the femoral artery, you'll like as not bleed to death before— You fool! "

For the second time the courtroom shook to the sharp crack and the hollow reverberations of the Colt. Donnelly was on the floor, both hands gripped round his lower thigh, staring up at me with an expression compounded of incomprehension and dazed disbelief.

" We've all got to learn sometime," I said flatly.

I glanced at the doorway, the shots were bound to have attracted attention, but there was no one there. Not that I was anxious on this point: apart from the two constables—both of them temporarily unfit for duty—who had jumped me at La Contessa, the sheriff and Donnelly constituted the entire police force of Marble Springs. But even so, delay was as foolish as it was dangerous.

" You won't get far, Talbot! " The sheriff's thin-lipped mouth twisted itself into exaggerated movements as he spoke through tightly-clenched teeth. " Within five minutes of leaving, every law officer in the county will be looking for you; within fifteen minutes the call will be state-wide." He broke off, wincing, as a spasm of pain twisted his face, and when he looked at me again his expression wasn't pretty. " The call's going out for a murderer, Talbot, an armed murderer; they'll have orders to shoot on sight and shoot to kill."

" Look, now, Sheriff—" the judge began, but got no further.

" Sorry, Judge. He's mine." The sheriff looked down at the policeman lying groaning on the floor. " The moment he took that gun, he stopped being your business . . . You better get going, Talbot; you won't have far to run."

" Shoot to kill, eh? " I said thoughtfully. I looked round the court. " No, no, not the gentlemen—they might start getting death or glory ideas about having medals pinned on them . . ."

" What the hell you talking about? " the sheriff demanded.

" Not the young ladies of the high school. Hysteria . . ." I murmured. I shook my head, then looked at the girl with the dark-blonde hair. " Sorry, miss, it'll have to be you."

" What—what do you mean? " Maybe she was scared, maybe she was just acting scared. " What do you want? "

" You. You heard what the Lone Ranger said—as soon as the cops see me, they're going to start shooting at everything in sight. But they wouldn't shoot at a girl, especially not at one as good-looking as you. I'm in a jam, miss, and I need an insurance policy. You're it. Come on."

" Damn it, Talbot, you can't do that! " Judge Mollison sounded hoarse, frightened. " An innocent girl. You'd put her life in danger—"

" Not me," I pointed out. " If anybody's going to put her life in danger, it'll be the friends of the sheriff here."

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" But—but Miss Ruthven is my guest. I—I invited her here this afternoon to—"

" Contravention of the rules of the old southern hospitality, I know." I caught her by the arm, pulled her none too gently to her feet and out into the aisle. " Hurry up, miss, we haven't— "

I dropped her arm and took one long step up the aisle, clubbed pistol already reversed and swinging. For some time now I'd had my eye on the broken-nosed character three seats behind the girl, and the play and shift of expression across the broken landscape of his Neanderthalic features, as he struggled to arrive at and finally made a decision, couldn't have been more clearly indicated by ringing bells and coloured lights.

He was almost vertical and halfway out into the aisle, with his right hand reaching deep under the lapel of his coat, when the butt end of my Colt caught his right elbow. The impact jarred even my arm, so I could only guess what it did to his: quite a lot, if his sudden collapse back into the bench was any criterion. Maybe I'd misjudged the man, maybe he'd only been reaching for another cigar. That would teach him not to carry a cigar-case under his left armpit.

He was still making a great deal of noise when I hobbled my way swiftly up the aisle, pulled the girl out into the porch, slammed the door, and locked it. That would give me only ten seconds, fifteen at the most, but it was all I needed. I grabbed the girl's hand and ran down the path to the street.

There were two cars parked by the kerb. One, an open Chevrolet without any official markings, was the police car in which the sheriff, Donnelly, and I had arrived at the court, the other, presumably Judge Mollison's, a low-built Studebaker Hawk. The judge's looked to be the faster car of the two, but most of those American cars had automatic-drive controls with which I was quite unfamiliar. I didn't know how to drive a Studebaker and the time it would take me to find out could be fatal. On the other hand, I did know how to operate the automatic-drive on a Chevrolet. On the way up to the courthouse I'd sat beside the sheriff, who drove, and I hadn't missed a move he made.

" Get in! " I nodded in the direction of the police car. " Fast! "

Out of a corner of an eye I saw her open the door while I spared a few moments for the Studebaker. The quickest and most effective way of immobilising any car is by smashing its distributor. I spent three or four seconds hunting for the bonnet-catch before I gave it up and turned my attention to the front tyre nearest me. Had it been a tubeless tyre and had I been carrying my usual automatic, the small-calibre steel-jacketed bullet might have failed to make more than a tiny hole, no sooner made than sealed: as it was, the mushrooming Colt bullet split the sidewall wide open and the Studebaker settled with a heavy bump.

The girl was already seated in the Chevrolet. Without bothering to open the door, I vaulted over the side into the driving-seat, took one swift glance at the dashboard, grabbed the white handbag

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the girl held in her lap, broke the catch and ripped the material in my hurry to open it, and emptied the contents on the seat beside me. The car keys were on the top of the pile, which meant she'd shoved them right to the bottom of her bag. I'd have taken long odds that she was good and scared, but longer odds still that she wasn't terrified.

"I suppose you thought that was clever?" I switched on the engine, pressed the automatic-drive button, released the hand-brake, and gunned the motor so savagely that the rear tyres spun and whined furiously on the loose gravel before getting purchase. "Try anything like that again and you'll be sorry. Regard that as a promise . . ."

The Chevrolet leapt forward as if it had been fitted with a rocket-assisted take-off—I suspected that being a police car it might have had a hotted-up engine—and when I'd straightened it up and had time for a fast look in the mirror we were a hundred yards away from the courthouse.

I had time for only a glimpse of the judge and the sheriff running out on to the road, staring after the Chevrolet, before a sharp right-angle bend came sweeping up towards us; a quick twist of the wheel to the right, a four-wheel drift, the back end breaking away, another twist of the wheel to the left and then, still accelerating, we were clear of the town limits and heading into the open country.

We were heading almost due north along the highway, a white and dusty ribbon of road built up several feet above the level of the surrounding land. Away to our left the Gulf of Mexico glittered and sparkled like a brilliant emerald under the broiling sun. Between the road and the sea was a flat uninteresting belt of low mangrove coast; to our right swampy forests, not of palms or palmettos as I would have expected to find in those parts but pine, and disheartened-looking scrub pine at that.

I wasn't enjoying the ride. I was pushing the Chev along as fast as I dared, and the soft swinging suspension gave me no feeling of security at all. I had no sunglasses, and even though the sun was not directly in my face, the savage glare of sub-tropical light off that road was harsh and hurtful to the eyes. It was an open car, but the windscreen was so big and deeply curved that we got almost no cooling benefit at all from the wind whistling by our ears at over eighty miles an hour. Back in the courtroom, the shade temperature had been close on a hundred; what it was out here in the open, I couldn't even begin to guess. But it was hot, furnace hot: I wasn't enjoying the ride.

Neither was the girl beside me. She hadn't even bothered to replace the stuff I'd emptied out of her bag, just sat there with her hands clasped tightly together. Now and again, as we took a fast corner, she reached out to grab the upper edge of the door, but otherwise she'd made no movement since we left Marble Springs except to tie a white bandanna over her fair hair.

She didn't once look at me. I didn't even know what colour her

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eyes were. And she certainly didn't once speak to me. Twice I glanced at her and each time she was staring straight ahead, lips compressed, face pale, a faint red patch burning high up in her left cheek. She was still scared, maybe more scared than ever. Maybe she was wondering what was going to happen to her. I was wondering that myself.

Eight miles and eight minutes out of Marble Springs the expected happened. Someone had thought fast and moved even faster.

The expected was a road-block. It came at a point where some enterprising firm had built up the land to the right of the road with crushed stone and coral, asphalted it and built a filling station and drivers' pull-in. Right across the road a car had been drawn up, a big black police car—if the two pivoting searchlights and the big red STOP light were not enough, the eight-inch white-lettered sign would have removed all doubt:

POLICE

To the left, just beyond the nose of the police car, the land dropped sharply four or five feet into a ditch that lifted only slowly to the mangrove coast beyond: there was no escape that way. To the right, where the road widened and angled into the courtyard of the filling station, a vertically upright line of black corrugated fifty-gallon oil drums completely blocked the space between the police car and the first of the line of petrol pumps that paralleled the road.

All this I saw in the four or five seconds it took me to bring the shuddering skidding Chevrolet down from seventy to thirty miles an hour, the high-pitched scream in our ears token of the black smoking trail of melted rubber that we were leaving on the white road behind us.

I saw, too, the policemen, one crouched behind the bonnet of the police car, a second with his head and right arm just visible above the boot: both of them carried revolvers. A third policeman was standing upright and almost completely hidden behind the nearest petrol pump, but there was nothing hidden about his gun, that most lethal of all close-quarters weapons, a whippet, a sawn-off hand-grip shotgun firing 20-gauge medium-lead shot.

I was down to twenty miles an hour now, not more than forty yards distant from the block. The policemen, guns levelled on my head, were rising and moving into the open, when out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of the girl reaching for the handle of the door and half turning away from me as she gathered herself for the leap out of the car. I said nothing, just leaned across, grabbed her arm, jerked her towards me with a savage force that made her gasp and, in the same instant that I transferred my grip to her shoulders and held her half against half in front of me so that the police dared not shoot, jammed my foot down on the accelerator.

"You madman! You'll kill us!" For a split second of time she stared at the row of fifty-gallon drums rushing up to meet us, the terror in her face accurately reflecting the terror in her voice, then turned away with a cry and buried her face in my coat, the nails of her hands digging into my upper arms.

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We hit the second drum from the left fair and square with the centre of our bumper. Subconsciously, I tightened my grip on the girl and the steering-wheel and braced myself for the numbing shattering shock, the stunning impact that would crush me against the wheel or pitch me through the windscreen as the five-hundred-pound deadweight of that drum sheared the chassis retaining bolts and smashed the engine back into the driving compartment.

But there was no such convulsive shock; just a screeching of metal and a great hollow reverberating clang as the bumper lifted the drum clear off the road, a moment of shock when I thought the drum would be carried over the bonnet of the car to smash the windscreen and pin us to the seat. With my free hand I jerked the wheel violently to the left, and the cartwheeling drum bounced across the nearside wing and vanished from sight as I regained the road, jerked the wheel in the opposite direction and straightened out. The oil drum had been empty. And not a shot had been fired.

Slowly the girl lifted her head, stared over my shoulder at the road-block dwindling in the distance, then stared at me. Her hands were still gripping both my shoulders, but she was completely unaware of it.

"You're mad." I could hardly catch the husky whisper through the crescendo roar of the engine. "You're mad, you must be. Crazy mad." Maybe she hadn't been terrified earlier on, but she was now.

"Move over, lady," I requested. "You're blocking my view."

She moved perhaps six inches, but her eyes, sick with fear, were still on me. She was trembling violently.

"You're mad," she repeated. "Please, please let me out."

"I'm not mad." I was paying as much attention to my rear mirror as to the road ahead. "I think a little, Miss Ruthven, and I'm observant. They couldn't have had more than a couple of minutes to prepare that road-block—and it takes more than a couple of minutes to bring six full drums out of store and manhandle them into position. The drum I hit had its filling-hole turned towards me—and there was no bung. It couldn't possibly have been full. And as for letting you out—well, I'm afraid I can't spare the time. Take a look behind you."

She looked. "They—they're coming after us!"

"What did you expect them to do—go into the restaurant and have a cup of coffee?"

The road was closer to the sea now, and winding to follow the indentations of the coast. Traffic was fairly light, but enough to hold me back from overtaking on some blind corners, and the police car behind was steadily gaining on me. The driver knew his car better than I did mine, and the road he obviously knew like the back of his hand. Ten minutes from the road-block he had crept up to within a hundred and fifty yards of us.

The girl had been watching the pursuing car for the past few minutes. Now she turned and stared at me. She made an effort

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to keep her voice steady, and almost succeeded. " What's going to happen now ? "

" Anything," I said briefly. " They'll likely play rough. I don't think they can be any too pleased with what happened back there."

Even as I finished speaking there came, in quick succession, two whip-like cracks clearly audible above the whine of the tyres and the roar of the engine. A glance at the girl's face told me I didn't need to spell out what was happening. She knew all right.

" Get down," I ordered. " That's it, right down on the floor. Your head, too. Whether it's bullets or a crash, your best chance is down there."

When she was crouched so low that all I could see were her shoulders and the back of her blonde head, I eased the revolver out of my pocket, abruptly removed my foot from the accelerator, grabbed for the handbrake, and hauled hard.

With no tell-tale warning from the foot-operated braking lights, the slowing down of the Chevrolet was as unexpected as it was abrupt, and the screech of tyres and violent slewing of the pursuing police car showed that the driver had been caught completely off balance. I loosed off one quick shot, and, as I did, the windscreen in front of me shattered and starred as a bullet went clear through the centre of it. I fired a second time, and the police car skidded wildly, finishing up almost broadside across the road, the near-side front wheel in the ditch on the right-hand side of the road. It was the sort of uncontrollable skid that might have come from a burst front tyre.

Certainly no harm had come to the policemen inside: within a couple of seconds of hitting the ditch, all three were out on the road, squeezing off shots after us as fast as they could pull the triggers; but we were already a hundred, a hundred and fifty yards away, and for all the value of revolvers and riot guns in distance work of this kind, they might as well have been throwing stones at us. In a few seconds we rounded a curve and they were lost to sight.

" All right," I said. " The war's over. You can get up, Miss Ruthven." She straightened and pushed herself back on the seat.

Some dark-blonde hair had fallen forward over her face, so she took off her bandanna, tidied her hair, and pulled the bandanna on again. Women, I thought: if they fell over a cliff and thought there was company waiting at the bottom, they'd comb their hair on the way down.

When she'd finished tying the knot under her chin she said in a subdued voice, without looking at me, " Thank you for making me get down. I—I might have been killed then."

" You might," I agreed. " But I was thinking about myself, lady. Your continued good health is very closely bound with mine. Without a real live insurance policy beside me, they'd use anything from a hand grenade to a 14-inch naval gun to stop me."

" They were trying to hit us then, they were trying to kill us." The tremor was back in her voice again as she nodded at the bullet hole in the windscreen. " I was sitting in line with that."

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" So you were. Chance in a thousand. They must have had orders not to fire indiscriminately, but maybe they were so mad at what happened back at the road-block that they forgot their orders. Likely that they were after one of our rear tyres. Hard to shoot well from a fast-moving car. Or maybe they just can't shoot well anyway."

Approaching traffic was still light, maybe two or three cars to the mile, but even that was too much for my peace of mind. Most of the cars were filled with family groups, holidaymakers, and like all holidaymakers they were not only curious about everything they saw but obviously had the time and the inclination to indulge their curiosity. Every other car slowed down as it approached us and in my mirror I saw the stop-lights of three or four of them come on as the driver tramped on the brakes and the occupants twisted round in their seats. Hollywood and a thousand TV films had made a bullet-starred windscreen an object readily identifiable by millions.

This was disturbing enough. Worse still was the near certainty that any minute now every local radio station within a hundred miles would be broadcasting the news of what had happened back at the Marble Springs courthouse, together with a complete description of the Chevrolet, myself, and the blonde girl beside me.

The chances were that at least half of those cars approaching me had their radios tuned in to one of those local stations with their interminable record programmes . . . The inevitable newsflash, then all it needed was for one of those cars to be driven by a halfwit out to show his wife and children what a hero he really was all the time although they had never suspected it.

I picked up the girl's still-empty handbag, stuck my right hand inside it, made a fist, and smashed away the centre of the laminated safety glass. The hole was now a hundred times bigger than before, but not nearly so conspicuous: in these days of stressed and curved glass, mysteriously shattered windscreens are not so unknown as to give rise to much comment: a flying pebble, a sudden change of temperature, even a loud enough sound at a critical frequency—any of those can blow out a screen.

But it wasn't enough. I knew it wasn't enough, and when an excited fast-talking voice broke into the soap-opera on the Chev's radio and gave a concise if highly-coloured account of my escape, warning all highway users to look out for and report the Chev, I knew that I would have to abandon the car, and at once. It was too hot, and on this, the only main north-south route, the chances of escaping detection just didn't exist. I had to have a new car, and had to have it fast.

I got one almost at once. We had been passing through one of those new towns which mushroom by the score along the seaboards of Florida when I heard the news, and less than two hundred yards beyond the limits we came to a lay-by on the shore side of the road. There were three cars there, and obviously they had been travelling in company, for through a gap in the trees and low scrub that curved round the lay-by I could see a group of seven or eight

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people picking their way down to the shore, about three hundred yards away. They were carrying with them a barbecue grill, a cooking stove, and luncheon baskets: they looked as if they intended making a stay.

I jumped out of the Chev, taking the girl with me, and quickly checked all three cars. Two were convertibles, the third a sports car, and all were open. There were no ignition keys in any of the locks, but the sports car owner had a spare set in a cubbyhole by the steering-column, hidden only by a folded chamois cloth.

I could just have driven off leaving the police car there, but that would have been stupid. As long as the Chev's whereabouts remained unknown, the search would be concentrated exclusively on it and little attention would be paid to the common car thief who had taken the other; but if the Chev were found in the lay-by, then the search would immediately be switched to the sports car.

Thirty seconds later I had the Chev back at the limits of the new town, slowing down as I came to the first of the all but completed split-levels on the shore side of the road. There was no one around, and I didn't hesitate. I turned in on the concreted drive of the first house, drove straight in under the open tip-up door of the garage, shut off the engine, and quickly closed the garage door.

When we emerged from the garage two or three minutes later, anyone looking for us would have looked a second or third time before getting suspicious. By coincidence, the girl had been wearing a short-sleeved green blouse of exactly the same shade of colour as my suit, a fact that had been repeated twice over the radio. A fast check point and a dead giveaway. Now the blouse was gone and the white suntop she'd on beneath it was the same as those worn by so many girls that blazing summer afternoon that she'd merged her identity with a thousand other women: her blouse was tucked inside my coat, my coat was inside out over my arm with only the grey lining showing, and my tie was in my pocket. I'd taken the bandanna from her, wrapped kerchief-wise over my head, the loose ends of the knot hanging down the right-hand side, in front, all but obscuring my scar. The red hair showing at the temples was still a giveaway and while, by the time I had finished smearing it with her moistened mascara pencil, it didn't look like any hair I had ever seen, at least it didn't look red.

Under the blouse and coat I carried the gun.

Walking slowly so as to minimise my limp, we reached the sports car in three minutes. This, too, like the one we'd just tucked away in the garage, was a Chevrolet, with the same engine as the other, but there the resemblance ended. It was a plastic-bodied two-seater. I'd driven one in Europe, and I knew that the claims for a hundred and twenty miles an hour were founded on fact.

I waited till a heavy gravel lorry came grinding past from the north, started the Corvette's engine under the sound of its passing —the group of people I'd seen earlier were on the shoreline now, but they might just have heard the distinctive note of this car's

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engine and might just have been suspicious—made a fast U-turn and took off after the heavy lorry. I noticed the startled expression on the girl's face as we drove off in the direction from which we'd just come.

"I know. Go on, say it. I'm crazy. Only I'm not crazy. The next road-block won't be so very far to the north now, and it'll be no hurried makeshift affair like the last time, it'll stop a fifty-ton tank. Maybe they'll guess that I'll guess that, maybe they'll conclude that I'll leave this road and make for the sideroads and tracks in the swamplands to the east there. Anyway, that's what I'd figure in their place. Good country for going to ground. So we'll just go south. They won't reckon on that. And then we'll hide for a few hours."

"Hide? Where? Where can you hide?" I didn't answer her question and she went on, "Let me go, please! You—you're quite safe now. You must be. You must be sure of yourself or you wouldn't be heading this way. Please!"

"Don't be silly," I said wearily. "Let you go—and within ten minutes every cop in the state will know what kind of car I'm driving and where I'm heading! You must think I'm crazy."

"But you can't trust me," she persisted. I hadn't shot anybody for twenty minutes, she wasn't scared any longer, at least not too scared to work things out. "How do you know I won't make signs at people, or shout out when you can do nothing about it, like at traffic lights, or—or hit you when you're not looking? How do you know—"

"That cop, Donnelly," I said apropos of nothing. "I wonder if the doctors got to him in time."

She got my point. The colour that had come back to her face drained out of it again. But she had the best kind of courage, or maybe the worst kind, the kind that gets you into trouble.

"My father is a sick man, Mr. Talbot." It was the first time she'd used my name, and I appreciated the Mr. "I'm terribly afraid of what will happen to him when he hears this. He—well, he has a very bad heart and—"

"And I have a wife and four starving kiddies," I interrupted. "We can wipe each other's tears away. Be quiet."

She said nothing, not even when I pulled up at a drugstore a few moments later, went inside, and made a short phone call. She was with me, far enough away not to hear what I was saying but near enough to see the shape of the gun under my folded coat. On the way out I bought cigarettes. The assistant looked at me, then at the Corvette roadster parked outside.

"Hot day for driving, mister. Come far?"

"Only from Chilicoote Lake." I'd seen the turn-off sign three or four miles to the north. My efforts at an American accent made me wince. "Fishing."

"Fishing, eh?"

The tone was neutral enough, which was more than could be said for the half leer in his eyes as he looked over the girl by my side,

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but my Sir Galahad instincts were in abeyance that afternoon so I let it pass. " Catch anything ? "

" Some." I had no idea what fish if any were in the local lakes and, when I came to think of it, it seemed unlikely that anyone should take off for those shallow swampy lakes when the whole of the Gulf of Mexico lay at his front door. " Lost 'em, though." My voice sharpened in remembered anger. " Just put the basket down on the road for a moment when some crazy idiot comes past doing eighty. Knocked basket and fish to hell and breakfast. And so much dust on those sideroads I couldn't even catch his number."

" You get 'em everywhere." His eyes suddenly focused on a point a hundred miles away, then he said quickly, " What kind of car, mister? "

" Blue Chev. Broken windscreen. Why, what's the matter? "

" ' What's the matter? ' he asks. Do you mean to tell me you haven't—? Did you see the guy drivin' it? "

" No. Too fast. Just that he had a lot of red hair, but—"

" Red hair. Chilicoote Lake. Brother! " He turned and ran for the phone.

We went out into the sunshine. The girl said, " You don't miss much, do you? How—how can you be so cool? He might have recognised—"

" Get into the car. Recognise me? He was too busy looking at you. When they made that suntop I guess they ran out of material but just decided to go ahead and finish it off anyway."

We got in and drove off. Four miles farther on we came to the place I had noticed on the way up. It was a palm-shaded parking space between the road and the shore, and a big sign hung under a temporary wooden archway.

Codell Construction Company

it read; then, underneath, in bigger lettering,

SIDEWALK SUPERINTENDENTS: DRIVE RIGHT IN

I drove right in. There were fifteen, maybe twenty cars already parked inside, some people sitting on the benches provided, but most of them still in the seats of their cars. They were all watching the construction of foundations designed to take a seaward extension of a new town. Four big draglines, caterpillar-mounted power shovels, were crawling slowly, ponderously around, tearing up underwater coral rock from the bay, building up a solid wide foundation, then crawling out on the pier just constructed and tearing up more coral rock.

One was building a wide strip straight out to sea: this would be the main street of the new town. Two others were making small piers at right angles. A fourth was making a big loop to the north, curving back into land again. A yacht harbour, probably. It was a fascinating process to watch, this making of a town out of the bottom of the sea, only I was in no mood to be fascinated.

I parked the car between a couple of empty convertibles, opened the packet of cigarettes I'd just bought, and lit one. The girl had half turned in her seat and was staring at me incredulously.

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"Is this the place you meant when you said we'd go somewhere to hide?"

"This is it," I assured her.

"You're going to stay here?"

"What's it look like to you?"

"With all those people around? Where everyone can see you? Twenty yards off the road where every passing police patrol—"

"See what I mean? Everyone would think the same as you. This is the last place any hunted man in his senses would think of coming. So it's the ideal place. So here we stay."

"You can't stay here for ever," she said steadily.

"No," I agreed. "Just till it gets dark. Move closer, Miss Ruthven, real close. A man fleeing for his life, Miss Ruthven. What picture does that conjure up? An exhausted wild-eyed individual crashing through the high timber or plunging up to his armpits through some of the choicer Florida swamps. Certainly not sitting in the sunshine getting all close and confidential with a pretty girl. Nothing in the world less calculated to arouse suspicion, is there? Move over, lady."

"I wish I had that gun in my hand," she said quietly.

"I don't doubt it. Move over."

She moved. I felt the uncontrollable shudder of revulsion as her bare shoulder touched mine.

I tried to imagine how I would feel if I were a pretty young girl in the company of a murderer, but it was too difficult, I wasn't a girl, I wasn't even particularly young or goodlooking, so I gave it up, showed her the gun under the coat lying over my knees, and sat back to enjoy the light onshore breeze that tempered the sunlight filtering through the fronds of the rustling palm trees.

But it didn't look as if the sunlight would be with us too long, that sea breeze being pulled in by the sun-scorched land was laden with moisture, and already the tiny white scraps of cloud that had been drifting across the sky were building and thickening up into grey cumulus. I didn't like that much. I wanted to have the excuse to keep wearing the bandanna on my head.

Maybe ten minutes after we arrived a black police car came along the highway, from the south. I watched in the mirror as it slowed down and two policemen put their heads out to give the car park a quick once-over. But their scrutiny was as cursory as it was swift, you could see they didn't really expect to see anything interesting, and the car pulled away before its speed had dropped to walking pace.

The hope in the girl's eyes—they were grey and cool and clear, I could see now—died out like a snuffed candle-flame, the rounding and drooping of her sunburnt shoulders unmistakable.

Half an hour later the hope was back. Two motorcycle cops, helmeted, gauntleted, very tough and very competent, swept in under the archway in perfect unison, stopped in perfect unison, and killed their motors on the same instant. For a few seconds they sat there, high gleaming boots astride on the ground, then they

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dismounted, kicked down the rests, and started moving round the cars. One of them had a revolver in his hand.

They started at the car nearest the entrance, with only a quick glance for the car itself but a long penetrating wordless stare for the occupants. They weren't doing any explaining and they weren't doing any apologising: they looked like cops might look if they had heard that another cop had been shot. And was dying. Or dead.

Suddenly they skipped two or three cars and came straight at us. At least that seemed to be their intention, but they skirted us and headed for a Ford to the left and ahead of us. As they passed by, I felt the girl stiffening, saw her taking a quick deep breath.

" Don't do it! " I flung an arm round her and grabbed her tight. The breath she'd meant for the warning shout was expelled in a gasp of pain.

The policeman nearest turned round and saw the girl's face buried between my shoulder and neck and looked away again. Having seen what he thought he'd seen, he made a remark to his companion that wasn't as sotto voce as it might have been, and might have called for action in normal circumstances. But the circumstances weren't normal. I let it go.

When I released the girl, her face was red practically all the way down to the suntop. Pressed in against my neck, she hadn't been getting much air, but I think it was the policeman's remark that was responsible for most of the colour. Her eyes were wild. For the first time she'd stopped being scared and was fighting mad.

" I'm going to turn you in." Her voice was soft, implacable. " Give yourself up."

The policeman had checked the Ford. The driver had been dressed in a green jacket the same colour as mine, with a panama hat jammed far down on his head. I'd seen him as he'd driven in: his hair was black and his tanned face moustached and chubby. But the police hadn't moved on. They were no more than five yards away, but the tearing and growling of the big draglines covered our soft voices.

" Don't be a fool," I said quietly. " I have a gun."

" And there's only one bullet in it." She was right. Two slugs had gone in the courthouse, one bursting the tyre of the judge's Studebaker, and two when the police car was chasing us.

" Quite the little counter, aren't you? " I murmured. " You'll have plenty of time to practise counting in hospital after the surgeons have fixed you up. If they can fix you up."

She looked at me, her lips parted, and said nothing.

I brought the gun forward under the coat, pressed it against her. " You heard me telling that fool Donnelly what a soft lead slug can do. This barrel is against your hipbone. Do you realise what that means? "

My voice was very low now, very menacing. " It'll shatter that bone beyond repair. It means you'll never walk again, Miss Ruthven. You'll never run or dance or swim or sit a horse again. All the rest of your life you'll have to drag that beautiful body

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of yours about on a pair of crutches. Or in a bath-chair. Al the days of your life . . . Still going to shout to the cops ?"

She said nothing at first, her face was empty of colour, even he lips were pale.

"Do you believe me?" I asked softly.

"I believe you."

"So?"

"So I'm going to call them," she said simply. "Maybe you'l cripple me—but they'll certainly get you. And then you can neve kill again. I must do it."

"Your noble sentiments do you credit, Miss Ruthven." Th jeer in my voice was no reflection of the thoughts in my mind. Sh was going to do what I wouldn't have done. "Go and call them Watch them die."

She stared at me. "What—what do you mean? You've onl one bullet—"

"And it's no longer for you. First squawk out of you, lady, an that cop with the gun in his hand gets it. He gets it right throug the middle of the chest. I'm pretty good with one of these Colts— you saw how I shot the gun out of the sheriff's hands. But I'm taking no chances. Through the chest. Then I hold up the othe cop—there'll be no trouble about that, his own gun is still buttone down, he knows I'm a killer and he doesn't know that my gun wil be empty—take his gun, wing him with it, and go off." I smiled

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" I don't think anyone will try to stop me."

" But—but I'll tell him your gun's empty. I'll tell—"

" You come first, lady. An elbow in the solar plexus and you won't be able to tell anybody anything for the next five minutes."

There was a long silence, the cops were still there, then she said in a small voice, " You'd do it, wouldn't you? "

" There's only one way to find out the answer to that one."

" I hate you." There was no expression in her voice, the clear grey eyes were dark with despair and defeat. " I never thought I could hate anyone so much. It—it scares me."

" Stay scared and stay alive." I watched the policemen finish their tour of the car park, walk slowly back to their motorbikes, and ride away.

The late afternoon wore slowly on. The draglines growled and crunched and crawled their implacable way out towards the sea. The sidewalk superintendents came and went, but mostly went, and soon there was only a couple of cars left, ours and the Ford belonging to the man in the green coat. And then the steadily darkening cumulus sky reached its final ominous indigo colour and the rain came.

It came with the violence of all sub-tropical storms and, before I could get the unaccustomed hood up, my thin cotton shirt was as wet as if I had been in the sea. When I'd wound up the side-windows and looked in the mirror, I saw that my face was streaked with black lines from temple to chin—the mascara on my hair had almost washed out.

I scrubbed as clean as I could with a handkerchief, then looked at my watch. With the dark cloud obscuring the sky from horizon to horizon, evening had come before its time. Already the cars swishing by on the highway had their sidelights on, although it was still more day than night. I started the engine.

" You were going to wait until it was dark." The girl sounded startled. Maybe she'd been expecting more cops, smarter cops to come along.

" I was," I admitted. " But by this time Mr. Chas. Brooks is going to be doing a song and dance act a few miles back on the highway. His language will be colourful."

" Mr. Chas. Brooks? " From her tone, I wondered if she really thought I was crazy.

" Of Pittsburg, California." I tapped the licence tag on the steering column. " A long way to come to have your car hi-jacked." I lifted my eyes to the machine-gun symphony of the heavy rain drumming on the canvas roof. " You don't think he'll still be barbecueing down on the beach in this little lot, do you? "

I pulled out through the makeshift archway and turned right on the highway. When she spoke this time, I knew she really did think I was crazy.

" Marble Springs." A pause. " You're going back there? " It was question and statement both.

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" Right. To the motel—La Contessa. Where the cops picked me up. I left some stuff there and I want to collect it."

This time she said nothing. Maybe she thought " crazy " a completely inadequate word.

I pulled off the bandanna—in the deepening dusk that white gleam on my head was more conspicuous than my red hair—and went on, " Last place they'll ever think to find me. I'm going to spend the night there, maybe several nights until I find me a boat out. So are you." I ignored the involuntary exclamation. " That's the phone call I made back at the drugstore. I asked if Room 14 was vacant, they said yes, so I said I'd take it, friends who'd passed through had recommended it as having the nicest view in the motel. In point of fact it has the nicest view. It's also the most private room, at the seaward end of a long block; it's right beside the cupboard where they put my case away when the cops pinched me, and it has a nice private little garage where I can stow this machine away and no one will ever ask a question."

A mile passed, two miles, three, and she said nothing. She'd put her green blouse on again, but it was a lacy scrap of nothing, she'd got just as wet as I had when I was trying to fix the roof, and she was having repeated bouts of shivering. The rain had made the air cool. We were approaching the outskirts of Marble Springs when she spoke.

" You can't do it. How can you? You've got to check in or sign a book to pick up keys or go to the restaurant. You can't just—"

" Yes, I can. I asked them to have the place opened up ready for us, keys in the garage and room doors, told them we'd check in later. I said we'd come a long way since dawn, that we were tired out, and that we'd appreciate room service for meals and a little privacy." I cleared my throat. " I told the receptionist we were a honeymoon couple. She seemed to understand our request for privacy."

We were there before she could find an answer. I turned in through an ornate lilac-painted gateway and drew up near the reception hall in the central block, parking the car directly under a powerful floodlamp which threw such black shadows that my red hair would be all but invisible under the car roof. Over by the entrance stood a negro dressed in a lilac, blue, and gold-buttoned uniform that had been designed by a colourblind man wearing smoked glasses. I called him across.

" Room 14? " I asked. " Which way, please? "

" Mr. Brooks? " I nodded, and he went on, " I've left all the keys ready. Down this way."

" Thank you." I looked at him. Grey and bent and thin and the faded old eyes the clouded mirrors of a thousand sorrows and defeats. " What's your name? "

" Charles, sir."

" I want some whisky, Charles." I passed money across. " Scotch, not Bourbon. And some brandy. Can you? "

" Right away, sir."

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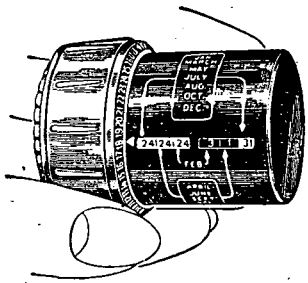

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"Thanks." I let in the gear, drove down the block to No. 14. It was at the end of a narrow peninsula between the gulf to the left and a kidney-shaped swimming pool to the right. The garage door was open and I drove straight in, switched off the car lights, closed the sliding door in the near-darkness, then switched on the overhead light.

At the inner end of the left-hand wall a single door led off the garage. We went through this into a kitchenette, neat, hygienic, and superbly equipped if all you wanted was a cup of coffee and had all night to make it. A door led off this into the bed-sittingroom. Lilac carpet, lilac curtains, lilac bedspread, lilac lampshades, lilac seat-covers, the same excruciating motif wherever you looked. Somebody had liked lilac. Two more doors off this room: to the left, let into the same wall as the kitchen door, the door to the bathroom; at the far end, the door leading into the corridor.

I was in this corridor within ten seconds of arriving in the room, dragging the girl after me. The cupboard was no more than six feet away, unlocked, and my bag still where it had been left. I carried it back to the room, unlocked it, and was about to start throwing some stuff on the bed when a knock came on the door.

"That will be Charles," I murmured. "Open the door, stand well back, take the bottles, tell him to keep the change. Don't try to whisper, make signs, or any clever little jumps out into the middle of the corridor. I'll be watching you from the crack of the bathroom door and my gun will be lined up on your back."

She didn't try any of those things. I think she was too cold, miserable, and exhausted by the accumulated tension of the day to try anything. The old man handed over the bottles, took the change with a surprised murmur of thanks, and closed the door softly behind him.

"You're frozen and shivering," I said abruptly. "I don't want my insurance policy to go catching pneumonia." I fetched a couple of glasses. "Some brandy, Miss Ruthven, then a hot bath. Maybe you'll find something dry in my case."

"You're very kind," she said bitterly. "But I'll take the brandy."

"No bath, huh?"

"No." A hesitant pause, a glint in her eye more imagined than seen, and I knew I'd been mistaken in imagining her to be too worn out to try anything. "Yes, that too."

"Right." I waited till she'd finished her glass, dumped my case on the bathroom floor, and stood to let her pass. "Don't be all night. I'm hungry."

The door closed and the key clicked in the lock. There came the sound of water running into the bath, then all the unmistakable soaping and splashing sounds of someone having a bath. All meant to lull any suspicions. Then came the sound of someone towelling themselves, and when, a minute or two later, there came the furious gurgling of water running out of the wastepipe, I eased myself off the door, passed through the two kitchen doors and

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outside garage door just in time to see the bathroom window open and a little cloud of steam come gushing out. I caught her arm as she lowered herself to the ground, stifled the frightened gasp with my free hand, and led her back inside.

I closed the kitchen door and looked at her. She looked fresh and scrubbed and clean and had one of my white shirts tucked into the waistband of her skirt. She had tears of mortification in her eyes and defeat in her face, but for all that it was a face worth looking at. Despite our long hours in the car together, it was the first time I had really looked at it.

She had wonderful hair, thick and gleaming and parted in the middle. But she would never win a Miss America contest, she had too much character in her face for that, she wouldn't even have been in the running for Miss Marble Springs. The face was slightly Slavonic, the cheekbones too high and wide, the mouth too full, the still grey eyes set too far apart, and the nose definitely retroussé. A mobile and intelligent face, a face, I guessed, that could move easily into sympathy and kindness and humour and laughter, when the weariness was gone and the fear.

In the days before I had given up the dream of my own slippers and my own fireside, this was the face that would have fitted the dream. She was the sort of person who would wear well, the sort of person who would still be part of you long after the synthetic chromium-polished blondes from the production lines of the glamour factory had you climbing up the walls.

I was just standing there, feeling a little sorry for her and feeling a little sorry for myself, when I felt a cold draught on the back of my neck. It came from the direction of the bathroom door, and ten seconds ago that bathroom door had been closed and locked. But it wasn't now.

It didn't require the sudden widening of the girl's eyes to tell me that I wasn't imagining that cold draught on the back of my neck. A cloud of steam from the overheated bathroom drifted past my right ear, a little bit too much to have escaped through the keyhole of a locked door. About a thousand times too much. I turned slowly, keeping my hands well away from my sides. Maybe I would try something clever later. But not now.

The first thing I noticed was the gun in his hand, and it wasn't the sort of gun a beginner carries around with him. A big dull black German Mauser 7.63. One of those economical guns; the bullet goes clear through three people at once.

The second thing I noticed was that the bathroom doorway seemed to have shrunk since I'd seen it last. His shoulders didn't quite touch both sides of the doorway, but that was only because it was a wide doorway. His hat certainly touched the lintel.

The third thing I noticed was the kind of hat he wore and the colour of the jacket. A panama hat, a green jacket. It was our friend and neighbour from the Ford that had been parked beside us earlier that afternoon.

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He reached behind him with his left hand and softly closed the bathroom door.

" You shouldn't leave windows open. Let me have your gun." His voice was quiet and deep, but there was nothing stagy or menacing about it, you could see it was the way he normally spoke.

" Gun? " I tried to look baffled.

" Look, Talbot," he said pleasantly. " I suspect we're both what you might call professionals. I suggest we cut the unnecessary dialogue. Gun. The thing you're carrying in your right coat pocket there. With the finger and thumb of the left hand. So. Now drop it on the carpet. Thank you."

I kicked the gun across to him without being told. I didn't want him to think I wasn't a professional too.

" Now sit down," he said. He smiled at me, and I could see now that his face wasn't chubby, unless you could call a lump of rock chubby. It was just broad, and looked as if you could bounce a two-by-four off it without achieving very much. The narrow black moustache and the thin, almost Grecian nose looked out of place, as incongruous, almost, as the laughter lines round the eyes and on either side of the mouth.

I didn't place much store on the laughter lines, maybe he only practised smiling when he was beating someone over the head with a gun.

" You recognised me in the car park ? " I asked.

" No." He broke open the Colt with his left hand, ejected the remaining shell, closed the gun, and with a careless flick of his wrist sent it spinning ten feet to land smack in the wastepaper basket.

He looked as if he could do this sort of thing ten times out of ten, everything this man tried would always come off. If he was so good with his left hand, what could he do with his right?

" I'd never seen you before this afternoon, I'd never even heard of you when first I saw you," he continued. " But I'd seen and heard of this young lady here a hundred times. You're a Limey, or you'd have heard of her too. Maybe you have, but don't know who you got there; you wouldn't be the first person to be fooled by her. No make-up, no accent. You only look and behave like that either if you've given up competing—or if there's no one left to compete against."

He looked at the girl and smiled again. " For Mary Blair Ruthven there's no competition left. When you're as socially acceptable as she is, and your old man is who he is . . . "

" Her old man? "

" Such ignorance. Blair Ruthven. General Blair Ruthven. You've heard of the *Mayflower*—it was old Ruthven's ancestors who gave the Pilgrims permission to land. And he's within an ace of being the richest oil man in the United States."

I made no comment, there didn't seem to be any that would meet the case. I wondered what he'd say if I told him of my pipe-dream of slippers, a fire, and a multi-million heiress. Instead I said,

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"And you'd your radio switched on in the car park. I heard it. And then a newsflash."

"That's it," he agreed cheerfully.

"Who are you?" It was Mary Blair speaking for the first time since he'd entered, and that was what being in the top one per cent of the Four Hundred did for you. You didn't swoon, you didn't murmur, "Thank God," in a broken voice, you didn't burst into tears and fling your arms round your rescuer's neck, you just gave him a nice friendly smile which showed he was your equal even if you knew quite well he wasn't and said, "Who are you?"

"Jablonsky, miss. Herman Jablonsky."

"I suppose you came over in the *Mayflower* too," I said sourly. I looked consideringly at the girl. "Millions and millions of dollars, eh? That's a lot of money to be walking around. Anyway, that explains away Valentino."

"Valentino?" You could see she still thought I was crazy.

"The broken-faced gorilla behind you in the courtroom. If your old man shows as much judgment in picking oil wells as he does in picking bodyguards, you're going to be on relief pretty soon."

"He's not my usual—" She bit her lip, and something like a shadow of pain touched those clear grey eyes. "Mr. Jablonsky, I owe you a great deal."

Jablonsky smiled again and said nothing. He fished out a packet of cigarettes, tapped the bottom, extracted one with his teeth, bent back a cardboard match in a paper folder, then threw cigarettes and matches across to me. That's how the high-class boys operated today. Civilised, courteous, observing all the little niceties, they'd have made the hoodlums of the thirties feel slightly ill. Which made a man like Jablonsky all the more dangerous: like an iceberg, seven-eighths of his lethal menace was out of sight. The old-time hoodlums couldn't even have begun to cope with him.

"I take it you are prepared to use that gun," Mary Blair went on. She wasn't as cool and composed as she appeared and sounded; I could see a pulse beating in her neck, and it was going like a racing car. "I mean, this man can't do anything to me now?"

"Nary a thing," Jablonsky assured her.

"Thank you." A little sigh escaped her, as if it wasn't until that moment that she really believed her terror was over, that there was nothing more to fear. She moved across the room. "I'll phone the police."

"No," Jablonsky said quietly.

She broke step. "I beg your pardon?"

"I said, 'No,'" Jablonsky murmured. "No phone, no police, I think we'll leave the law out of it."

"What on earth do you mean?" Again I could see a couple of red spots burning high up in her cheeks. The last time I'd seen those it had been fear that had put them there, this time it looked like the first stirrings of anger. When your old man had lost count of the oil wells he owned, people didn't cross you very often.

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"We must have the police," she went on, speaking slowly and patiently like someone explaining something to a child. "This man is a criminal. A wanted criminal. And a murderer. He killed a man in London."

"And in Marble Springs," Jablonsky said quietly. "Patrolman Donnelly died at five-forty this afternoon."

"Died?" Her voice was a whisper. "Are you sure?"

"Six o'clock news. Got it just before I tailed you out of the car park. Surgeons, transfusions, the lot. He died."

"How horrible!" She looked at me, but it was no more than a flickering glance; she couldn't bear the sight of me. "And—and you say don't get the police. What do you mean?"

"What I say," the big man said equably. "No law."

"Mr. Jablonsky has ideas of his own, Miss Ruthven," I said dryly.

"The result of your trial is a foregone conclusion," Jablonsky said to me tonelessly. "For a man with three weeks to live, you take things pretty coolly. Don't touch that phone, miss!"

"You wouldn't shoot me." She was already across the room. "You're no murderer."

"I wouldn't shoot you," he agreed. "I don't have to." He reached her in three long strides—he could move as quickly and softly as a cat—took the phone from her, caught her arm, and led her back to a chair beside me. She tried to struggle free, but Jablonsky didn't even notice it.

"You don't want law, eh?" I asked thoughtfully. "Kind of cramps your style a little bit, friend."

"Meaning I don't want company?" he murmured. "Meaning maybe I would be awful reluctant to fire this gun?"

"Meaning just that."

"I wouldn't gamble on it," he smiled.

I gambled. I had my feet gathered under me and my hands on the arms of the chair. The back of my chair was solidly against the wall, and I took off in a dive that was almost parallel to the floor, arrowing on for a spot about six inches below his breastbone.

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The second part of Fear is the Key by Alistair MacLean appears in next month's Argosy on sale September 8

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *White magic.* 9, *Zero.* 10, *Matterhorn.* 11, *Thrums.* 12, *Starlet.* 15, *Bubbles.* 16, *Sheer.* 17, *Ruth.* 18, *Scan.* 19, *Smile.* 21, *Produce.* 22, *Expunge.* 24, *Evolve.* 27, *More nurses.* 28, *Aces.* 29, *Right dress.*

Down. 2, *Hear.* 3, *Totter.* 4, *Marines.* 5, *Glow.* 6, *Centaur.* 7, *Republican.* 8, *Horse-sense.* 12, *Scrap metal.* 13, *Astrologer.* 14, *Theme.* 15, *Belle.* 19, *Schemer.* 20, *Extinct.* 23, *Usurer.* 25, *Brag.* 26, *Tess.*

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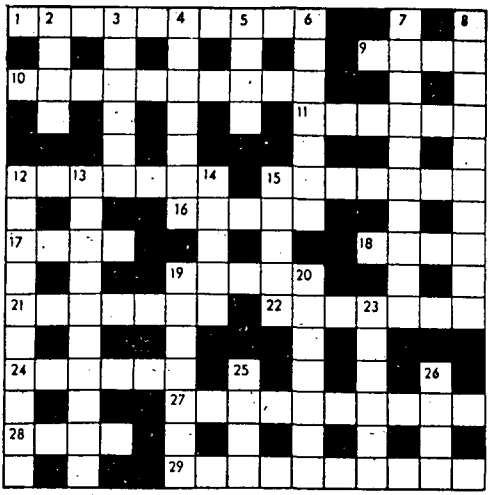
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution on page 143



ACROSS

1 Chan Canasta's strong suit (5, 5).

9 It's nothing at all (4).

10 Mountain of some substance? (10).

11 Barrie's window was here (6).

12 Hollywood sensation in the making (7).

15 Millais' blue-eyed boy (7).

16 Girl hesitates to swerve (5).

17 Pity for Naomi (4).

18 Look inside this candle (4).

19 Say cheese! (5).

21 Proceeds of Benito supporter (7).

22 Wipe out with internal jest (7).

24 Disclose broken love, first and last (6).

27 More hospitals mean this (4, 6).

28 You need these for 25 (4).

29 Proper rig-out for the barrack square? (5, 5).

DOWN

2 Double it! Agreed? (4).

3 Little one starts to take his first steps (6).

4 Amphibians—but are they really gullible? (7).

5 —— of pride, perhaps (4).

6 Horsy type, isn't he? (7).

7 The pubkeeper's in a party (10).

8 Does 6 display this? (5-5).

12 Fighting material? No, odds and ends (5, 5).

13 You'll find him in a gaol roster (10).

14 Article about printer's unit is main subject (5).

15 Sounds worthwhile ringing her (5).

19 Iago, of course (7).

20 Dodo's fate, poor thing (7).

23 Loan wolf (6).

25 Dress up for the card game (4).

26 A Hardy girl (4).

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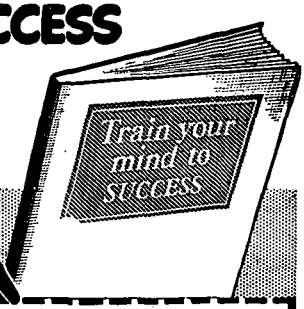

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